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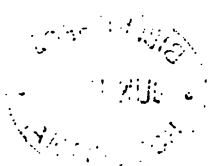

JEZEBEL'S DAUGHTER

BY

WILKIE COLLINS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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TO ALBERTO CACCIA.

LET me begin by informing you, that this new novel does not present the proposed sequel to my last work of fiction—'The Fallen Leaves.'

The first part of that story has, through circumstances connected with the various forms of publications adopted thus far, addressed itself to a comparatively limited class of readers in England. When the book is finally reprinted in its cheapest form—then, and then only, it will appeal to the great audience of the English people. I am waiting for that time, to complete my design by writing the second part of 'The Fallen Leaves.'

Why?

Your knowledge of English Literature—to which I am indebted for the first faithful and intelligent translation of my novels into the Italian language—has long since informed you, that there are certain important social topics which are held to be forbidden to the English novelist (no matter how seriously and how delicately he may treat them), by a narrow-

minded minority of readers, and by the critics who flatter their prejudices. You also know, having done me the honour to read my books, that I respect my art far too sincerely to permit limits to be wantonly assigned to it, which are imposed in no other civilised country on the face of the earth. When my work is undertaken with a pure purpose, I claim the same liberty which is accorded to a writer in a newspaper, or to a clergyman in a pulpit; knowing, by previous experience, that the increase of readers and the lapse of time will assuredly do me justice, if I have only written well enough to deserve it.

In the prejudiced quarters to which I have alluded, one of the characters in 'The Fallen Leaves' offended susceptibilities of the sort felt by Tartuffe, when he took out his handkerchief, and requested Dorine to cover her bosom. I not only decline to defend myself, under such circumstances as these—I say plainly, that I have never asserted a truer claim to the best and noblest sympathies of Christian readers than in presenting to them, in my last novel, the character of the innocent victim of infamy, rescued and purified from the contamination of the streets. I remember what the nasty posterity of Tartuffe, in this country, said of 'Basil,' of 'Armadale,' of 'The New Magdalen,' and I know that the wholesome audience of the nation at large has done liberal justice to those books. For this reason, I wait to write the second part of 'The

Fallen Leaves,' until the first part of the story has found its way to the people.

Turning for a moment to the present novel, you will (I hope) find two interesting studies of humanity in these pages.

In the character called 'Jack Straw,' you have the exhibition of an enfeebled intellect, tenderly shown under its lightest and happiest aspect, and used as a means of relief in some of the darkest scenes of terror and suspense occurring in this story. Again, in 'Madame Fontaine,' I have endeavoured to work out the interesting moral problem, which takes for its groundwork the strongest of all instincts in a woman, the instinct of maternal love, and traces to its solution the restraining and purifying influence of this one virtue over an otherwise cruel, false, and degraded nature.

The events in which these two chief personages play their parts have been combined with all possible care, and have been derived, to the best of my ability, from natural and simple causes. In view of the distrust which certain readers feel, when a novelist builds his fiction on a foundation of fact, it may not be amiss to mention (before I close these lines), that the accessories of the scenes in the Deadhouse of Frankfort have been studied on the spot. The pub-

lished rules and ground-plans of that curious mortuary establishment have also been laid on my desk, as aids to memory while I was writing the closing passages of the story.

With this, I commend 'Jezebel's Daughter' to my good friend and brother in the art—who will present this last work also to the notice of Italian readers.

W. C.

GLOUCESTER PLACE, LONDON:

February 9, 1880.

PART I.

MR. DAVID GLENNEY CONSULTS HIS MEMORY AND OPENS THE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

In the matter of Jezebel's Daughter, my recollections begin with the deaths of two foreign gentlemen, in two different countries, on the same day of the same year.

They were both men of some importance in their way, and both strangers to each other.

Mr. Ephraim Wagner, merchant (formerly of Frankfort-on-the-Main), died in London on the third day of September, 1828.

Doctor Fontaine—famous in his time for discoveries in experimental chemistry—died

at Würzburg on the third day of September, 1828.

Both the merchant and the doctor left widows. The merchant's widow (an Englishwoman) was childless. The doctor's widow (of a South German family) had a daughter to console her.

At that distant time—I am writing these lines in the year 1878, and looking back through half a century—I was a lad employed in Mr. Wagner's office. Being his wife's nephew, he most kindly received me as a member of his household. What I am now about to relate I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears. My memory is to be depended on. Like other old men, I recollect events which happened at the beginning of my career far more clearly than

events which happened only two or three years since.

Good Mr. Wagner had been ailing for many months; but the doctors had no immediate fear of his death. He proved the doctors to be mistaken; and took the liberty of dying at a time when they all declared that there was every reasonable hope of his recovery. When this affliction fell upon his wife, I was absent from the office in London on a business errand to our branch-establishment at Frankfort-on-the-Main, directed by Mr. Wagner's partners. The day of my return happened to be the day after the funeral. It was also the occasion chosen for the reading of the will. Mr. Wagner, I should add, had been a

naturalised British citizen, and his will was drawn by an English lawyer.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth clauses of the will are the only portions of the document which it is necessary to mention in this place.

The fourth clause left the whole of the testator's property, in lands and in money, absolutely to his widow. In the fifth clause he added a new proof of his implicit confidence in her—he appointed her sole executrix of his will.

The sixth and last clause began in these words:—

'During my long illness, my dear wife has acted as my secretary and representative. She has made herself so thoroughly well acquainted with the system on which I have

conducted my business, that she is the fittest person to succeed me. I not only prove the fulness of my trust in her and the sincerity of my gratitude towards her, but I really act in the best interests of the firm of which I am the head, when I hereby appoint my widow as my sole successor in the business, with all the powers and privileges appertaining thereto.'

The lawyer and I both looked at my aunt. She had sunk back in her chair; her face was hidden in her handkerchief. We waited respectfully until she might be sufficiently recovered to communicate her wishes to us. The expression of her husband's love and respect, contained in the last words of the will, had completely overwhelmed her. It was only after she had

been relieved by a burst of tears that she was conscious of our presence, and was composed enough to speak to us.

'I shall be calmer in a few days' time,' she said. 'Come to me at the end of the week. I have something important to say to both of you.'

The lawyer ventured on putting a question. 'Does it relate in any way to the will?' he inquired.

She shook her head. 'It relates,' she answered, 'to my husband's last wishes.'

She bowed to us, and went away to her own room.

The lawyer looked after her gravely and doubtfully as she disappeared. 'My long experience in my profession,' he said, turning to me, 'has taught me many useful lessons.

Your aunt has just called one of those lessons to my mind.'

'May I ask what it is, sir?'

'Certainly.' He took my arm and waited to repeat the lesson until we had left the house; 'Always distrust a man's last wishes on his death-bed—unless they are communicated to his lawyer, and expressed in his will.'

At the time, I thought this rather a narrow view to take. How could I foresee that coming events in the future life of my aunt would prove the lawyer to be right? If she had only been content to leave her husband's plans and projects where he had left them at his death, and if she had never taken that rash journey to our branch office at Frankfort——but what is the use of

speculating on what might or might not have happened? My business in these pages is to describe what did happen. Let me return to my business.

CHAPTER II.

At the end of the week we found the widow waiting to receive us.

To describe her personally, she was a little lady, with a remarkably pretty figure, a clear pale complexion, a broad low forehead, and large, steady, brightly-intelligent grey eyes. Having married a man very much older than herself, she was still (after many years of wedded life) a notably attractive woman. But she never seemed to be conscious of her personal advantages, or vain of the very remarkable abilities which she

did unquestionably possess. Under ordinary circumstances, she was a singularly gentle, unobtrusive creature. But let the occasion call for it, and the reserves of resolution in her showed themselves instantly. In all my experience I have never met with such a firm woman, when she was once roused.

She entered on her business with us, wasting no time in preliminary words. Her face showed plain signs, poor soul, of a wakeful and tearful night. But she claimed no indulgence on that account. When she spoke of her dead husband—excepting a slight unsteadiness in her voice—she controlled herself with a courage which was at once pitiable and admirable to see.

'You both know,' she began, 'that Mr. Wagner was a man who thought for himself.

He had ideas of his duty to his poor and afflicted fellow-creatures which are in advance of received opinions in the world about us. I love and revere his memory—and (please God) I mean to carry out his ideas.'

The lawyer began to look uneasy. 'Do you refer, madam, to Mr. Wagner's political opinions?' he inquired.

Fifty years ago, my old master's political opinions were considered to be nothing less than revolutionary. In these days—when his opinions have been sanctioned by Acts of Parliament, with the general approval of the nation—people would have called him a 'Moderate Liberal,' and would have set him down as a discreetly deliberate man in the march of modern progress.

think of sending you, David,' she added, turning to me, 'to our partners in Frankfort, Mr. Keller and Mr. Engelman, with instructions which will keep some of the vacant situations in the office open, until I can follow you.' She paused, and looked at the lawyer. 'Do you see any objection to what I propose?' she said.

'I see some risks,' he answered, cautiously.

'What risks?'

'In London, madam, the late Mr. Wagner had special means of investigating the characters of the women whom he took into his office. It may not be so easy for you, in a strange place like Frankfort, to guard against the danger—' He hesitated, at a loss for the moment to express himself

with sufficient plainness and sufficient delicacy.

My aunt made no allowances for his embarrassment.

'Don't be afraid to speak out, sir,' she said, a little coldly. 'What danger are you afraid of?'

'Yours is a generous nature, madam: and generous natures are easily imposed upon. I am afraid of women with bad characters, or, worse still, of other women—'

He stopped again. This time there was a positive interruption. We heard a knock at the door.

Our head-clerk was the person who presented himself at the summons to come in. My aunt held up her hand. 'Excuse me, Mr. Hartrey—I will attend to you in one

moment.' She turned to the lawyer. 'What other women are likely to impose on me?' she asked.

'Women, otherwise worthy of your kindness, who may be associated with disreputable connections,' the lawyer replied. 'The very women, if I know anything of your quick sympathies, whom you would be most anxious to help, and who might nevertheless be a source of constant trouble and anxiety, under pernicious influences at home.'

My aunt made no answer. For the moment, the lawyer's objections seemed to annoy her. She addressed herself to Mr. Hartrey; asking rather abruptly what he had to say to her.

Our head-clerk was a methodical gentle-

man of the old school. He began by confusedly apologising for his intrusion; and ended by producing a letter.

'When you are able to attend to business, madam, honour me by reading this letter. And, in the meantime, will you forgive me for taking a liberty in the office, rather than intrude on your grief so soon after the death of my dear and honoured master?' The phrases were formal enough; but there was true feeling in the man's voice as he spoke. My aunt gave him her hand. He kissed it, with the tears in his eyes.

'Whatever you have done has been well done, I am sure,' she said kindly. 'Who is the letter from?'

'From Mr. Keller, of Frankfort, madam.'

My aunt instantly took the letter from him, and read it attentively. It has a very serious bearing on passages in the present narrative which are yet to come. I accordingly present a copy of it in this place:

'Private and confidential.

'Dear Mr. Hartrey,—It is impossible for me to address myself to Mrs. Wagner, in the first days of the affliction that has fallen on her. I am troubled by a pressing anxiety; and I venture to write to you, as the person now in charge at our London office.

'My only son Fritz is finishing his education at the university of Würzburg. He has, I regret to say, formed an attachment to a young woman, the daughter of a doctor at Würzburg, who has recently died. I believe the girl to be a perfectly reputable

and virtuous young person. But her father has not only left her in poverty, he has done worse—he has died in debt. Besides this, her mother's character does not stand high in the town. It is said, among other things, that her extravagance is mainly answerable for her late husband's debts. Under these circumstances, I wish to break off the connection while the two young people are separated for the time by the event of the doctor's recent death. Fritz has given up the idea of entering the medical profession, and has accepted my proposal that he shall succeed me in our business. I have decided on sending him to London, to learn something of commercial affairs, at head-quarters, in your office.

'My son obeys me reluctantly; but he

is a good and dutiful lad—and he yields to his father's wishes. You may expect him in a day or two after receipt of these lines. Oblige me by making a little opening for him in one of your official departments, and by keeping him as much as possible under your own eye, until I can venture on communicating directly with Mrs. Wagner—to whom pray convey the expression of my most sincere and respectful sympathy.'

My aunt handed back the letter. 'Has the young man arrived yet?' she asked.

'He arrived yesterday, madam.'

'And have you found some employment for him?'

'I have ventured to place him in our corresponding department,' the head-clerk answered. 'For the present he will assist in

copying letters; and, after business-hours, he will have a room (until further orders) in my house. I hope you think I have done right, madam?'

'You have done admirably, Mr. Hartrey. At the same time, I will relieve you of some of the responsibility. No grief of mine shall interfere with my duty to my husband's partner. I will speak to the young man myself. Bring him here this evening, after business-hours. And don't leave us just yet; I want to put a question to you relating to my husband's affairs, in which I am deeply interested.' Mr. Hartrey returned to his chair. After a momentary hesitation, my aunt put her question in terms which took us all three by surprise.

CHAPTER III.

'My husband was connected with many charitable institutions,' the widow began. 'Am I right in believing that he was one of the governors of Bethlehem Hospital?'

At this reference to the famous asylum for insane persons, popularly known among the inhabitants of London as 'Bedlam,' I saw the lawyer start, and exchange a look with the head-clerk. Mr. Hartrey answered with evident reluctance; he said, 'Quite right, madam'—and said no more. The lawyer, being the bolder man of the two, added a

word of warning, addressed directly to my aunt.

'I venture to suggest,' he said, 'that there are circumstances connected with the late Mr. Wagner's position at the Hospital, which make it desirable not to pursue the subject any farther. Mr. Hartrey will confirm what I say, when I tell you that Mr. Wagner's proposals for a reformation in the treatment of the patients—'

'Were the proposals of a merciful man,' my aunt interposed, 'who abhorred cruelty in all its forms, and who held the torturing of the poor mad patients by whips and chains to be an outrage on humanity. I entirely agree with him. Though I am only a woman, I will not let the matter drop. I shall go to the Hospital on Monday morning

next—and my business with you to-day is to request that you will accompany me.'

'In what capacity am I to have the honour of accompanying you?' the lawyer asked, in his coldest manner.

'In your professional capacity,' my aunt replied. 'I may have a proposal to address to the governors; and I shall look to your experience to express it in the proper form.'

The lawyer was not satisfied yet. 'Excuse me if I venture on making another inquiry,' he persisted. 'Do you propose to visit the madhouse in consequence of any wish expressed by the late Mr. Wagner?'

'Certainly not! My husband always avoided speaking to me on that melancholy subject. As you have heard, he even left me in doubt whether he was one of the

governing body at the asylum. No reference to any circumstance in his life which might alarm or distress me ever passed his lips.' Her voice failed her as she paid that tribute to her husband's memory. She waited to recover herself. 'But, on the night before his death,' she resumed, 'when he was half waking, half dreaming, I heard him talking to himself of something that he was anxious to do, if the chance of recovery had been still left to him. Since that time I have looked at his private diary; and I have found entries in it which explain to me what I failed to understand clearly at his bedside. I know for certain that the obstinate hostility of his colleagues had determined him on trying the effect of patience and kindness in the treatment of mad people, at his sole risk and

expense. There is now in Bethlehem Hospital a wretched man—a friendless outcast, found in the streets—whom my noble husband had chosen as the first subject of his humane experiment, and whose release from a life of torment he had the hope of effecting through the influence of a person in authority in the Royal Household. You know already that the memory of my husband's plans and wishes is a sacred memory to me. I am resolved to see that poor chained creature whom he would have rescued if he had lived; and I will certainly complete his work of mercy, if my conscience tells me that a woman should do it.'

Hearing this bold announcement—I am almost ashamed to confess it, in these enlightened days—we all three protested.

Modest Mr. Hartrey was almost as loud and as eloquent as the lawyer, and I was not far behind Mr. Hartrey. It is perhaps to be pleaded as an excuse for us that some of the highest authorities, in the early part of the present century, would have been just as prejudiced and just as ignorant as we were. Say what we might, however, our remonstrances produced no effect on my aunt. We merely roused the resolute side of her character to assert itself.

'I won't detain you any longer,' she said to the lawyer. 'Take the rest of the day to decide what you will do. If you decline to accompany me, I shall go by myself. If you accept my proposal, send me a line this evening to say so.'

In that way the conference came to an end.

Early in the evening young Mr. Keller made his appearance, and was introduced to my aunt and to me. We both took a liking to him from the first. He was a handsome young man, with light hair and florid complexion, and with a frank ingratiating manner—a little sad and subdued, in consequence, no doubt, of his enforced separation from his beloved young lady at Würzburg. My aunt, with her customary kindness and consideration, offered him a room next to mine, in place of his room in Mr. Hartrey's house. 'My nephew David speaks German; and he will help to make your life among us pleasant to you.' With those words our good mistress left us together.

Fritz opened the conversation with the easy self-confidence of a German student.

'It is one bond of union between us that you speak my language,' he began. 'I am good at reading and writing English, but I speak badly. Have we any other sympathies in common? Is it possible that you smoke?'

Poor Mr. Wagner had taught me to smoke. I answered by offering my new acquaintance a cigar.

'Another bond between us,' cried Fritz. 'We must be friends from this moment. Give me your hand.' We shook hands. He lit his cigar, looked at me very attentively, looked away again, and puffed out his first mouthful of smoke with a heavy sigh.

'I wonder whether we are united by a third bond?' he said thoughtfully. 'Are

you a stiff Englishman? Tell me, friend David, may I speak to you with the freedom of a supremely wretched man?'

'As freely as you like,' I answered. He still hesitated.

'I want to be encouraged,' he said. 'Be familiar with me. Call me Fritz.'

I called him 'Fritz.' He drew his chair close to mine, and laid his hand affectionately on my shoulder. I began to think I had perhaps encouraged him a little too readily.

'Are you in love, David?' He put the question just as coolly as if he had asked me what o'clock it was.

I was young enough to blush. Fritz accepted the blush as a sufficient answer. 'Every moment I pass in your society,' he cried with enthusiasm, 'I like you better—I

find you more eminently sympathetic. You are in love. One word more—are there any obstacles in your way?'

There *were* obstacles in my way. She was too old for me, and too poor for me—and it all came to nothing in due course of time. I admitted the obstacles; abstaining, with an Englishman's shyness, from entering into details. My reply was enough, and more than enough, for Fritz. 'Good Heavens!' he exclaimed; 'our destinies exactly resemble each other! We are both supremely wretched men. David, I can restrain myself no longer; I must positively embrace you!'

I resisted to the best of my ability—but he was the stronger man of the two. His long arms almost strangled me; his bristly

moustache scratched my cheek. In my first involuntary impulse of disgust, I clenched my fist. Young Mr. Keller never suspected (my English brethren alone will understand) how very near my fist and his head were to becoming personally and violently acquainted. Different nations—different customs. I can smile as I write about it now.

Fritz took his seat again. 'My heart is at ease; I can pour myself out freely,' he said. 'Never, my friend, was there such an interesting love-story as mine. She is the sweetest girl living. Dark, slim, gracious, delightful, desirable, just eighteen. The image, I should suppose, of what her widowed mother was at her age. Her name is Minna. Daughter and only child of Madame

Fontaine. Madame Fontaine is a truly grand creature, a Roman matron. She is the victim of envy and scandal. Would you believe it? There are wretches in Würzburg (her husband the doctor was professor of chemistry at the University)—there are wretches, I say, who call my Minna's mother "Jezebel," and my Minna herself "Jezebel's Daughter!" I have fought three duels with my fellow-students to avenge that one insult. Alas, David, there is another person who is influenced by those odious calumnies! —a person sacred to me—the honoured author of my being. Is it not dreadful? My good father turns tyrant in this one thing; declares I shall never marry "Jezebel's Daughter;" exiles me, by his paternal commands, to this foreign country; and

perches me on a high stool to copy letters. Ha! he little knows my heart. I am my Minna's and my Minna is mine. In body and soul, in time and in eternity, we are one. Do you see my tears? Do my tears speak for me? The heart's relief is in crying freely. There is a German song to that effect. When I recover myself, I will sing it to you. Music is a great comforter; music is the friend of love. There is another German song to *that* effect.' He suddenly dried his eyes, and got on his feet; some new idea had apparently occurred to him. 'It is dreadfully dull here,' he said; 'I am not used to evenings at home. Have you any music in London? Help me to forget Minna for an hour or two. Take me to the music.'

Having, by this time, heard quite enough of his raptures, I was eager on my side for a change of any kind. I helped him to forget Minna at a Vauxhall Concert. He thought our English orchestra wanting in subtlety and spirit. On the other hand, he did full justice, afterwards, to our English bottled beer. When we left the Gardens he sang me that German song, 'My heart's relief is crying freely,' with a fervour of sentiment which must have awakened every light sleeper in the neighbourhood.

Retiring to my bedchamber, I found an open letter on my toilet-table. It was addressed to my aunt by the lawyer; and it announced that he had decided on accompanying her to the madhouse—without pledging himself to any further concession.

In leaving the letter for me to read, my aunt had written across it a line in pencil: 'You can go with us, David, if you like.'

My curiosity was strongly roused. It is needless to say I decided on being present at the visit to Bedlam.

CHAPTER IV.

On the appointed Monday we were ready to accompany my aunt to the madhouse.

Whether she distrusted her own unaided judgment, or whether she wished to have as many witnesses as possible to the rash action in which she was about to engage, I cannot say. In either case, her first proceeding was to include Mr. Hartrey and Fritz Keller in the invitation already extended to the lawyer and myself.

They both declined to accompany us. The head-clerk made the affairs of the office serve for his apology, it was foreign post

day, and he could not possibly be absent from his desk. Fritz invented no excuses; he confessed the truth, in his own outspoken manner. 'I have a horror of mad people,' he said, 'they so frighten and distress me, that they make me feel half mad myself. Don't ask me to go with you—and oh, dear lady, don't go yourself.'

My aunt smiled sadly—and led the way out.

We had a special order of admission to the Hospital which placed the resident superintendent himself at our disposal. He received my aunt with the utmost politeness, and proposed a scheme of his own for conducting us over the whole building; with an invitation to take luncheon with him afterwards at his private residence.

'At another time, sir, I shall be happy to avail myself of your kindness,' my aunt said, when he had done. 'For the present, my object is to see one person only among the unfortunate creatures in this asylum.'

'One person only?' repeated the superintendent. 'One of our patients of the higher rank, I suppose?'

'On the contrary,' my aunt replied, 'I wish to see a poor friendless creature, found in the streets; known here, as I am informed, by no better name than Jack Straw.'

The superintendent looked at her in blank amazement.

'Good Heavens, madam!' he exclaimed; 'are you aware that Jack Straw is one of

the most dangerous lunatics we have in the house?'

'I have heard that he bears the character you describe,' my aunt quietly admitted.

'And yet you wish to see him?'

'I am here for that purpose—and no other.'

The superintendent looked round at the lawyer and at me, appealing to us silently to explain, if we could, this incomprehensible desire to see Jack Straw. The lawyer spoke for both of us. He reminded the superintendent of the late Mr. Wagner's peculiar opinions on the treatment of the insane, and of the interest which he had taken in this particular case. To which my aunt added: 'And Mr. Wagner's widow feels

the same interest, and inherits her late husband's opinions.' Hearing this, the superintendent bowed with his best grace, and resigned himself to circumstances. 'Pardon me if I keep you waiting for a minute or two,' he said, and rang a bell.

A man-servant appeared at the door.

'Are Yarcombe and Foss on duty on the south side?' the superintendent asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'Send one of them here directly.'

We waited a few minutes—and then a gruff voice became audible on the outer side of the door. 'Present, sir,' growled the gruff voice.

The superintendent courteously offered his arm to my aunt. 'Permit me to escort

you to Jack Straw,' he said, with a touch of playful irony in his tone.

We left the room. The lawyer and I followed my aunt and her escort. A man, whom we found posted on the door-mat, brought up the rear. Whether he was Yarcombe or whether he was Foss, mattered but little. In either case he was a hulking, scowling, hideously ill-looking brute. 'One of our assistants,' we heard the superintendent explain. 'It is possible, madam, that we may want two of them, if we are to make things pleasant at your introduction to Jack Straw.'

We ascended some stairs, shut off from the lower floor by a massive locked door, and passed along some dreary stone passages, protected by more doors. Cries of rage and

pain, at one time distant and at another close by, varied by yelling laughter, more terrible even than the cries, sounded on either side of us. We passed through a last door, the most solid of all, which shut out these dreadful noises, and found ourselves in a little circular hall. Here the superintendent stopped, and listened for a moment. There was dead silence. He beckoned to the attendant, and pointed to a heavily nailed oaken door.

'Look in,' he said.

The man drew aside a little shutter in the door, and looked through the bars which guarded the opening.

'Is he waking or sleeping?' the superintendent asked.

'Waking, sir.'

'Is he at work?'

'Yes, sir.'

The superintendent turned to my aunt.

'You are fortunate, madam—you will see him in his quiet moments. He amuses himself by making hats, baskets, and table-mats, out of his straw. Very neatly put together, I assure you. One of our visiting physicians, a man with a most remarkable sense of humour, gave him his nickname from his work. Shall we open the door?'

My aunt had turned very pale; I could see that she was struggling with violent agitation. 'Give me a minute or two first,' she said; 'I want to compose myself before I see him.'

She sat down on a stone bench outside

the door. 'Tell me what you know about this poor man?' she said. 'I don't ask out of idle curiosity—I have a better motive than that. Is he young or old?'

'Judging by his teeth,' the superintendent answered, as if he had been speaking of a horse, 'he is certainly young. But his complexion is completely gone, and his hair has turned grey. So far as we have been able to make out (when he is willing to speak of himself), these peculiarities in his personal appearance are due to a narrow escape from poisoning by accident. But how the accident occurred, and where it occurred, he either cannot or will not tell us. We know nothing about him, except that he is absolutely friendless. He speaks English—but it is with an odd kind of accent—and we

don't know whether he is a foreigner or not. You are to understand, madam, that he is here on sufferance. This is a royal institution, and, as a rule, we only receive lunatics of the educated class. But Jack Straw has had wonderful luck. Being too mad, I suppose, to take care of himself, he was run over in one of the streets in our neighbourhood by the carriage of an exalted personage, whom it would be an indiscretion on my part even to name. The personage (an illustrious lady, I may inform you) was so distressed by the accident—without the slightest need, for the man was not seriously hurt—that she actually had him brought here in her carriage, and laid her commands on us to receive him. Ah, Mrs. Wagner, her highness's heart is worthy of her high-

ness's rank. She occasionally sends to inquire after the lucky lunatic who rolled under her horse's feet. We don't tell her what a trouble and expense he is to us. We have had irons specially invented to control him; and, if I am not mistaken,' said the superintendent, turning to the assistant, 'a new whip was required only last week.'

The man put his hand into the big pocket of his coat, and produced a horrible whip, of many lashes. He exhibited this instrument of torture with every appearance of pride and pleasure. 'This is what keeps him in order, my lady,' said the brute, cheerfully. 'Just take it in your hand.'

My aunt sprang to her feet. She was so indignant that I believe she would have laid the whip across the man's shoulders, if his

master had not pushed him back without ceremony. 'A zealous servant,' said the superintendent, smiling pleasantly. 'Please excuse him.'

My aunt pointed to the cell door.

'Open it,' she said. 'Let me see *anything*, rather than set eyes on that monster again!'

The firmness of her tone evidently surprised the superintendent. He knew nothing of the reserves of resolution in her, which the mere sight of the whip had called forth. The pallor had left her face; she trembled no longer; her fine grey eyes were bright and steady. 'That brute has roused her,' said the lawyer, looking back at the assistant, and whispering to me; 'nothing will restrain her, David—she will have her way now.'

CHAPTER V.

THE superintendent opened the cell door with his own hand.

We found ourselves in a narrow, lofty prison, like an apartment in a tower. High up, in one corner, the grim stone walls were pierced by a grated opening, which let in air and light. Seated on the floor, in the angle formed by the junction of two walls, we saw the superintendent's 'lucky lunatic' at work, with a truss of loose straw on either side of him. The slanting rays of light from the high window streamed down on his prema-

turely grey hair, and showed us the strange yellow pallor of his complexion, and the youthful symmetry of his hands, nimbly occupied with their work. A heavy chain held him to the wall. It was not only fastened round his waist, it also fettered his legs between the knee and the ankle. At the same time, it was long enough to allow him a range of crippled movement, within a circle of five or six feet, as well as I could calculate at the time. Above his head, ready for use if required, hung a small chain evidently intended to confine his hands at the wrists. Unless I was deceived by his crouching attitude, he was small in stature. His ragged dress barely covered his emaciated form. In other and happier days, he must have been a well-made little man; his

feet and ankles, like his hands, were finely and delicately formed. He was so absorbed in his employment that he had evidently not heard the talking outside his cell. It was only when the door was banged to by the assistant (who kept behind us, at a sign from the superintendent) that he looked up. We now saw his large vacantly-patient brown eyes, the haggard outline of his face, and his nervously sensitive lips. For a moment, he looked from one to the other of the visitors with a quiet childish curiosity. Then his wandering glances detected the assistant, waiting behind us with the whip still in his hand.

In an instant the whole expression of the madman's face changed. Ferocious hatred glittered in his eyes; his lips, suddenly re-

tracted, showed his teeth like the teeth of a wild beast. My aunt perceived the direction in which he was looking, and altered her position so as to conceal from him the hateful figure with the whip, and to concentrate his attention on herself. With startling abruptness, the poor creature's expression changed once more. His eyes softened, a faint sad smile trembled on his lips. He dropped the straw which he had been plaiting, and lifted his hands with a gesture of admiration. 'The pretty lady!' he whispered to himself. 'Oh, the pretty lady!'

He attempted to crawl out from the wall, as far as his chain would let him. At a sign from the superintendent he stopped, and sighed bitterly. 'I wouldn't hurt the

lady for the world,' he said; 'I beg your pardon, Mistress, if I have frightened you.'

His voice was wonderfully gentle. But there was something strange in his accent—and there was perhaps a foreign formality in his addressing my aunt as 'Mistress.' Englishmen in general would have called her 'ma'am.'

We men kept our places at a safe distance from his chain. My aunt, with a woman's impulsive contempt of danger when her compassion is strongly moved, stepped forward to him. The superintendent caught her by the arm and checked her. 'Take care,' he said. 'You don't know him as well as we do.'

Jack's eyes turned on the superintendent,

dilating slowly. His lips began to part again—I feared to see the ferocious expression in his face once more. I was wrong. In the very moment of another outbreak of rage, the unhappy man showed that he was still capable, under strong internal influence, of restraining himself. He seized the chain that held him to the wall in both hands, and wrung it with such convulsive energy that I almost expected to see the bones of his fingers start through the skin. His head dropped on his breast, his wasted figure quivered. It was only for an instant. When he looked up again, his poor vacant brown eyes turned on my aunt, dim with tears. She instantly shook off the superintendent's hold on her arm. Before it was possible to interfere, she was bending over

Jack Straw, with one of her pretty white hands laid gently on his head.

'How your head burns, poor Jack!' she said simply. 'Does my hand cool it?'

Still holding desperately by the chain, he answered like a timid child. 'Yes, Mistress; your hand cools it. Thank you.'

She took up a little straw hat on which he had been working when his door was opened. 'This is very nicely done, Jack,' she went on. 'Tell me how you first came to make these pretty things with your straw.'

He looked up at her with a sudden accession of confidence; her interest in the hat had flattered him.

'Once,' he said, 'there was a time when my hands were the maddest things about

me. They used to turn against me and tear my hair and my flesh. An angel in a dream told me how to keep them quiet. An angel said, "Let them work at your straw." All day long I plaited my straw. I would have gone on all night too, if they would only have given me a light. My nights are bad, my nights are dreadful. The raw air eats into me, the black darkness frightens me. Shall I tell you what is the greatest blessing in the world? Daylight! Daylight! ! Daylight ! ! !'

At each repetition of the word his voice rose. He was on the point of breaking into a scream, when he took a tighter turn of his chain and instantly silenced himself. 'I am quiet, sir,' he said, before the superintendent could reprove him.

My aunt added a word in his favour. 'Jack has promised not to frighten me; and I am sure he will keep his word. Have you never had parents or friends to be kind to you, my poor fellow?' she asked, turning to him again.

He looked up at her. 'Never,' he said, 'till you came here to see me.' As he spoke, there was a flash of intelligence in the bright gratitude of his eyes. 'Ask me something else,' he pleaded; 'and see how quietly I can answer you.'

'Is it true, Jack, that you were once poisoned by accident, and nearly killed by it?'

'Yes!'

'Where was it?'

'Far away in another country. In the

doctor's big room. In the time when I was the doctor's man.'

'Who was the doctor?'

He put his hand to his head, 'Give me more time;' he said. 'It hurts me when I try to remember too much. Let me finish my hat first. I want to give you my hat when it's done. You don't know how clever I am with my fingers and thumbs. Just look and see!'

He set to work on the hat; perfectly happy while my aunt was looking at him. The lawyer was the unlucky person who produced a change for the worse. Having hitherto remained passive, this worthy gentleman seemed to think it was due to his own importance to take a prominent part in the proceedings. 'My professional experi-

ence will come in well here,' he said; 'I mean to treat him as an unwilling witness; you will see we shall get something out of him in that way. Jack!'

The unwilling witness went on impenetrably with his work. The lawyer (keeping well out of reach of the range of the chain) raised his voice. 'Hullo, there!' he cried, 'you're not deaf, are you?'

Jack looked up, with an impish expression of mischief in his eyes. A man with a modest opinion of himself would have taken warning, and would have said no more. The lawyer persisted.

'Now, my man! let us have a little talk. "Jack Straw" can't be your proper name. What is your name?'

'Anything you like,' said Jack. 'What's yours?'

'Oh, come! that won't do. You must have had a father and mother.'

'Not that I know of.'

'Where were you born?'

'In the gutter.'

'How were you brought up?'

'Sometimes with a cuff on the head.'

'And at other times?'

'At other times with a kick. Do be quiet, and let me finish my hat.'

The discomfited lawyer tried a bribe as a last resource. He held up a shilling. 'Do you see this?'

'No, I don't. I see nothing but my hat.'

This reply brought the examination to

an end. The lawyer looked at the superintendent, and said, 'A hopeless case, sir.' The superintendent looked at the lawyer, and answered, 'Perfectly hopeless.'

Jack finished his hat, and gave it to my aunt. 'Do you like it, now it's done?' he asked.

'I like it very much,' she answered: 'and one of these days I shall trim it with ribbons, and wear it for your sake.'

She appealed to the superintendent, holding out the hat to him.

'Look,' she said. 'There is not a false turn anywhere in all this intricate plaiting. Poor Jack is sane enough to fix his attention to this subtle work. Do you give him up as incurable, when he can do that?'

The superintendent waved away the

question with his hand. 'Purely mechanical, he replied. 'It means nothing.'

Jack touched my aunt. 'I want to whisper,' he said. She bent down to him, and listened.

I saw her smile, and asked, after we had left the asylum, what he had said. Jack had stated his opinion of the principal officer of Bethlehem Hospital in these words: 'Don't you listen to him, Mistress; he's a poor half-witted creature. And short, too—not above six inches taller than I am!'

But my aunt had not done with Jack's enemy yet.

'I am sorry to trouble you, sir,' she resumed—'I have something more to say before I go, and I wish to say it privately. Can you spare me a few minutes?'

The amiable superintendent declared that he was entirely at her service. She turned to Jack to say good-bye. The sudden discovery that she was about to leave him was more than he could sustain; he lost his self-control.

'Stay with me!' cried the poor wretch, seizing her by both hands. 'Oh, be merciful, and stay with me!'

She preserved her presence of mind—she would permit no interference to protect her. Without starting back, without even attempting to release herself, she spoke to him quietly.

'Let us shake hands for to-day,' she said; 'you have kept your promise, Jack—you have been quiet and good. I must leave you for a while. Let me go.'

He obstinately shook his head, and still held her.

'Look at me,' she persisted, without showing any fear of him. 'I want to tell you something. You are no longer a friendless creature, Jack. You have a friend in me. Look up.'

Her clear firm tones had their effect on him; he looked up. Their eyes met.

'Now, let me go, as I told you.'

He dropped her hand, and threw himself back in his corner and burst out crying.

'I shall never see her again,' he moaned to himself. 'Never, never, never again!'

'You shall see me to morrow,' she said.

He looked at her through his tears, and looked away again with an abrupt change to distrust. 'She doesn't mean it,' he mut-

tered, still speaking to himself; 'she only says it to pacify me.'

'You shall see me to-morrow,' my aunt reiterated; 'I promise it.'

He was cowed, but not convinced; he crawled to the full length of his chain, and lay down at her feet like a dog. She considered for a moment—and found her way to his confidence at last.

'Shall I leave you something to keep for me until I see you again?'

The idea struck him like a revelation: he lifted his head, and eyed her with breathless interest. She gave him a little ornamental handbag, in which she was accustomed to carry her handkerchief, and purse, and smelling-bottle.

'I trust it entirely to you, Jack: you shall

give it back to me when we meet to-morrow.'

Those simple words more than reconciled him to her departure—they subtly flattered his self-esteem.

'You will find your bag torn to pieces, to-morrow,' the superintendent whispered, as the door was opened for us to go out.

'Pardon me, sir,' my aunt replied; 'I believe I shall find it quite safe.'

The last we saw of poor Jack, before the door closed on him, he was hugging the bag in both arms, and kissing it.

CHAPTER VI.

On our return to home, I found Fritz Keller smoking his pipe in the walled garden at the back of the house.

In those days, it may not be amiss to remark that merchants of the old-fashioned sort still lived over their counting-houses in the city. The late Mr. Wagner's place of business included two spacious houses standing together, with internal means of communication. One of these buildings was devoted to the offices and warehouses. The other (having the garden at the back) was the private residence.

Fritz advanced to meet me, and stopped, with a sudden change in his manner. 'Something has happened,' he said—'I see it in your face! Has the madman anything to do with it?'

'Yes. Shall I tell you what has happened, Fritz?'

'Not for the world. My ears are closed to all dreadful and distressing narratives. I will imagine the madman—let us talk of something else.'

'You will probably see him, Fritz, in a few weeks' time.'

'You don't mean to tell me he is coming into this house?'

'I am afraid it's likely, to say the least of it.'

Fritz looked at me like a man thunder-

struck. 'There are some disclosures,' he said, in his quaint way, 'which are too overwhelming to be received on one's legs. Let us sit down.'

He led the way to a summer-house at the end of the garden. On the wooden table, I observed a bottle of the English beer which my friend prized so highly, with glasses on either side of it.'

'I had a presentiment that we should want a consoling something of this sort,' said Fritz. 'Fill your glass, David, and let out the worst of it at once, before we get to the end of the bottle.'

I let out the best of it first—that is to say, I told him what I have related in the preceding pages. Fritz was deeply interested: full of compassion for Jack Straw, but not in

the least converted to my aunt's confidence in him.

'Jack is supremely pitiable,' he remarked; 'but Jack is also a smouldering volcano—and smouldering volcanos burst into eruption when the laws of nature compel them. My only hope is in Mr. Superintendent. Surely he will not let this madman loose on us, with nobody but your aunt to hold the chain? What did she really say, when you left Jack, and had your private talk in the reception-room? One minute, my friend, before you begin,' said Fritz, groping under the bench upon which we were seated. 'I had a second presentiment that we might want a second bottle—and here it is! Fill your glass; and let us establish ourselves in our respective posi-

tions—you to administer, and I to sustain, a severe shock to the moral sense. I think, David, this second bottle is even more deliciously brisk than the first. Well, and what did your aunt say?'

My aunt had said much more than I could possibly tell him.

In substance it had come to this:—After seeing the whip, and seeing the chains, and seeing the man—she had actually determined to commit herself to the perilous experiment which her husband would have tried, if he had lived! As to the means of procuring Jack Straw's liberation from the Hospital, the powerful influence which had insisted on his being received by the Institution, in defiance of rules, could also insist on his release, and could be approached by the

intercession of the same official person, whose interest in the matter had been aroused by Mr. Wagner in the last days of his life. Having set forth her plans for the future in these terms, my aunt appealed to the lawyer to state the expression of her wishes and intentions, in formal writing, as a preliminary act of submission towards the governors of the asylum.

'And what did the lawyer say to it?' Fritz inquired, after I had reported my aunt's proceedings thus far.

'The lawyer declined, Fritz, to comply with her request. He said, "It would be inexcusable, even in a man, to run such a risk—I don't believe there is another woman in England who would think of such a thing." Those were his words.'

'Did they have any effect on her?'

'Not the least in the world. She apologised for having wasted his valuable time, and wished him good morning. "If nobody will help me," she said, quietly, "I must help myself." Then she turned to me. "You have seen how carefully and delicately poor Jack can work," she said; "you have seen him tempted to break out, and yet capable of restraining himself in my presence. And, more than that, on the one occasion when he did lose his self-control, you saw how he recovered himself when he was calmly and kindly reasoned with. Are you content, David, to leave such a man for the rest of his life to the chains and the whip?" What could I say? She was too considerate to press me; she only asked me to think of

it. I have been trying to think of it ever since—and the more I try, the more I dread the consequences if that madman is brought into the house.'

Fritz shuddered at the prospect.

'On the day when Jack comes into the house, I shall go out of it,' he said. The social consequences of my aunt's contemplated experiment suddenly struck him while he spoke. 'What will Mrs. Wagner's friends think?' he asked piteously. 'They will refuse to visit her—they will say she's mad herself.'

'Don't let that distress you, gentlemen —I shan't mind what my friends say of me.'

We both started in confusion to our feet. My aunt herself was standing at the open

door of the summer-house with a letter in her hand.

'News from Germany, just come for you, Fritz.'

With those words, she handed him the letter, and left us.

We looked at each other thoroughly ashamed of ourselves, if the truth must be told. Fritz cast an uneasy glance at the letter, and recognised the handwriting on the address. 'From my father!' he said. As he opened the envelope a second letter enclosed fell out on the floor. He changed colour as he picked it up, and looked at it. The seal was unbroken—the postmark was Würzburg.

'Well?' I asked.

'Well,' Fritz repeated, 'it's an anonymous letter. The signature is "Your Unknown Friend."'

'Perhaps it relates to Miss Minna, or to her mother,' I suggested. Fritz turned back to the first page and looked up at me, red with anger. 'More abominable slanders! More lies about Minna's mother!' he burst out. 'Come here, David. Look at it with me. What do you say? Is it the writing of a woman or a man?'

The writing was so carefully disguised that it was impossible to answer his question. The letter (like the rest of the correspondence connected with this narrative) has been copied in duplicate and placed at my disposal. I reproduce it here for reasons which

will presently explain themselves—altering nothing, not even the vulgar familiarity of the address.

'My good fellow, you once did me a kindness a long time since. Never mind what it was or who I am. I mean to do you a kindness in return. Let that be enough.

'You are in love with "Jezebel's Daughter." Now, don't be angry! I know you believe Jezebel to be a deeply-injured woman; I know you have been foolish enough to fight duels at Würzburg in defence of her character.

'It is enough for you that she is a fond mother, and that her innocent daughter loves her dearly. I don't deny that she is a fond mother; but is the maternal instinct enough

of itself to answer for a woman? Why, Fritz, a cat is a fond mother; but a cat scratches and swears for all that! And poor simple little Minna, who can see no harm in anybody, who can't discover wickedness when it stares her in the face—is *she* a trustworthy witness to the widow's character? Bah!

'Don't tear up my letter in a rage; I am not going to argue the question with you any further. Certain criminal circumstances have come to my knowledge, which point straight to this woman. I shall plainly relate those circumstances, out of my true regard for you, in the fervent hope that I may open your eyes to the truth.

'Let us go back to the death of Doctor-Professor Fontaine, at his apartments in the

University of Würzburg, on the 3rd of September, in the present year 1828.

'The poor man died of typhoid fever, as you know—and died in debt, through no extravagance on his own part, as you also know. He had outlived all his own relatives, and had no pecuniary hopes or expectations from anyone. Under these circumstances, he could only leave the written expression of his last wishes, in place of a will.

'This document committed his widow and child to the care of his widow's relations, in terms of respectful entreaty. Speaking next of himself, he directed that he should be buried with the strictest economy, so that he might cost the University as little as possible. Thirdly, and lastly, he appointed one of his brother professors to act as his

sole executor, in disposing of those contents of his laboratory which were his own property at the time of his death.

'The written instructions to his executor are of such serious importance that I feel it my duty to copy them for you, word for word.

'Thus they begin:—

'"I hereby appoint my dear old friend and colleague, Professor Stein—now absent for a while at Munich, on University business—to act as my sole representative in the disposal of the contents of my laboratory, after my death. The various objects used in my chemical investigations, which are my own private property, will be all found arranged on the long deal table that stands between the two windows. They are to be offered

for sale to my successor, in the first instance. If he declines to purchase them, they can then be sent to Munich, to be sold separately by the manufacturer, as occasion may offer. The furniture of the laboratory, both movable and stationary, belongs entirely to the University, excepting the contents of an iron safe built into the south wall of the room. As to these, which are my own sole property, I seriously enjoin my executor and representative to follow my instructions to the letter:—

'"(1) Professor Stein will take care to be accompanied by a competent witness, when he opens the safe in the wall.

'"(2) The witness will take down in writing, from the dictation of Professor Stein, an exact list of the contents of the safe.

These are:—Bottles containing drugs, tin cases containing powders, and a small medicine-chest, having six compartments, each occupied by a labelled bottle, holding a liquid preparation.

"(3). The written list being complete, I desire Professor Stein to empty every one of the bottles and cases, including the bottles in the medicine-chest, into the laboratory sink, with his own hands. He is also to be especially careful to destroy the labels on the bottles in the medicine-chest. These things done, he will sign the list, stating that the work of destruction is accomplished; and the witness present will add his signature. The document, thus attested, is to be placed in the care of the Secretary to the University.

'"My object in leaving these instructions is simply to prevent the dangerous results which might follow any meddling with my chemical preparations, after my death.

'"In almost every instance, these preparations are of a poisonous nature. Having made this statement, let me add, in justice to myself, that the sole motive for my investigations has been the good of my fellow-creatures.

'"I have been anxious, in the first place, to enlarge the list of curative medicines having poison for one of their ingredients. I have attempted, in the second place, to discover antidotes to the deadly action of those poisons, which (in cases of crime or accident) might be the means of saving life.

'"If I had been spared for a few years longer, I should so far have completed my labours as to have ventured on leaving them to be introduced to the medical profession by my successor. As it is—excepting one instance, in which I ran the risk, and was happily enabled to preserve the life of a poisoned man—I have not had time so completely to verify my theories, by practical experiment, as to justify me in revealing my discoveries to the scientific world for the benefit of mankind.

'"Under these circumstances, I am resigned to the sacrifice of my ambition—I only desire to do no harm. If any of my preparations, and more particularly those in the medicine-chest, fell into ignorant or

wicked hands, I tremble when I think of the consequences which might follow. My one regret is, that I have not strength enough to rise from my bed, and do the good work of destruction myself. My friend and executor will take my place.

'"The key of the laboratory door, and the key of the safe, will be secured this day in the presence of my medical attendant, in a small wooden box. The box will be sealed (before the same witness) with my own seal. I shall keep it under my pillow, to give it myself to Professor Stein, if I live until he returns from Munich.

'"If I die while my executor is still absent, my beloved wife is the one person in the world whom I can implicitly trust to take charge of the sealed box. She will

give it to Professor Stein, immediately on his return to Würzburg; together with these instructions, which will be placed in the box along with the keys."

'There are the instructions, friend Fritz! They are no secret now. The Professor has felt it his duty to make them public in a court of law, in consequence of the events which followed Doctor Fontaine's death. You are interested in those events, and you shall be made acquainted with them before I close my letter.

'Professor Stein returned from Munich too late to receive the box from the hands of his friend and colleague. It was presented to him by the Widow Fontaine, in accordance with her late husband's wishes.

'The Professor broke the seal. Having read his Instructions, he followed them to the letter, the same day.

'Accompanied by the Secretary to the University, as a witness, he opened the laboratory door. Leaving the sale of the objects on the table to be provided for at a later date, he proceeded at once to take the list of the bottles and cases, whose contents he was bound to destroy. On opening the safe, these objects were found as the Instructions led him to anticipate: the dust lying thick on them vouched for their having been left undisturbed. The list being completed, the contents of the bottles and cases were thereupon thrown away by the Professor's own hand.

'On looking next, however, for the

medicine-chest, no such thing was to be discovered in the safe. The laboratory was searched from end to end, on the chance that some mistake had been made. Still no medicine-chest was to be found.

'Upon this the Widow Fontaine was questioned. Did she know what had become of the medicine-chest? She was not even aware that such a thing existed. Had she been careful to keep the sealed box so safely that no other person could get at it? Certainly! She had kept it locked in one of her drawers, and the key in her pocket.

'The lock of the drawer, and the locks of the laboratory door and the safe, were examined. They showed no sign of having been tampered with. Persons employed in

the University, who were certain to know, were asked if duplicate keys existed, and all united in answering in the negative. The medical attendant was examined, and declared that it was physically impossible for Doctor Fontaine to have left his bed, and visited the laboratory, between the time of writing his Instructions and the time of his death.

'While these investigations were proceeding, Doctor Fontaine's senior assistant obtained leave to examine through a microscope the sealing-wax left on the box which had contained the keys.

'The result of this examination, and of the chemical analyses which followed, proved that two different kinds of sealing-wax (both of the same red colour, super-

ficially viewed) had been used on the seal of the box—an undermost layer of one kind of wax, and an uppermost layer of another, mingled with the undermost in certain places only. The plain inference followed that the doctor's sealing-wax had been softened by heat so as to allow of the opening of the box, and that new sealing-wax had been afterwards added, and impressed by the Doctor's seal so that the executor might suspect nothing. Here, again, the evidence of the medical attendant (present at the time) proved that Doctor Fontaine had only used one stick of sealing-wax to secure the box. The seal itself was found in the possession of the widow; placed carelessly in the china tray in which she kept her rings after taking them off for the night.

'The affair is still under judicial investigation. I will not trouble you by reporting the further proceedings in detail.

'Of course, Widow Fontaine awaits the result of the investigation with the composure of conscious innocence. Of course, she has not only submitted to an examination of her lodgings, but has insisted on it. Of course, no red sealing-wax and no medicine-chest have been found. Of course, some thief unknown, for some purpose quite inconceivable, got at the box and the seal, between the Doctor's death and the return of the Professor from Munich, and read the Instructions and stole the terrible medicine-chest. Such is the theory adopted by the defence. If you can believe it—then I have written in vain. If, on the other

hand, you are the sensible young man I take you to be, follow my advice. Pity poor little Minna as much as you please, but look out for another young lady with an unimpeachable mother; and think yourself lucky to have two such advisers as your excellent father, and Your Unknown Friend.'

CHAPTER VIII.

'I WILL lay any wager you like,' said Fritz, when we had come to the end of the letter, 'that the wretch who has written this is a woman.'

'What makes you think so?'

'Because all the false reports about poor Madame Fontaine, when I was at Würzburg, were traced to women. They envy and hate Minna's mother. She is superior to them in everything; handsome, distinguished, dresses to perfection, possesses all the accomplishments—a star, I tell you, a brilliant star among a set of dowdy domestic drudges.

Isn't it infamous, without an atom of evidence against her, to take it for granted that she is guilty? False to her dead husband's confidence in her, a breaker of seals, a stealer of poisons—what an accusation against a defenceless woman! Oh, my poor dear Minna! how she must feel it; she doesn't possess her mother's strength of mind. I shall fly to Würzburg to comfort her. My father may say what he pleases; I can't leave these two persecuted women without a friend. Suppose the legal decision goes against the widow? How do I know that judgment has not been pronounced already? The suspense is intolerable. Do you mean to tell me I am bound to obey my father, when his conduct is neither just nor reasonable?'

'Gently, Fritz—gently!'

'I tell you, David, I can prove what I say. Just listen to this. My father has never even seen Minna's mother; he blindly believes the scandals afloat about her—he denies that any woman can be generally disliked and distrusted among her neighbours without some good reason for it. I assure you, on my honour, he has no better excuse for forbidding me to marry Minna than that. Is it just, is it reasonable, to condemn a woman without first hearing what she has to say in her own defence? Ah, now indeed I feel the loss of my own dear mother! If she had been alive she would have exerted her influence, and have made my father ashamed of his own narrow prejudices. My position is maddening; my head whirls when I think of it. If I go to Würzburg,

my father will never speak to me again. If I stay here, I shall cut my throat.'

There was still a little beer left in the bottom of the second bottle. Fritz poured it out, with a gloomy resolution to absorb it to the last drop.

I took advantage of this momentary pause of silence to recommend the virtue of patience to the consideration of my friend. News from Würzburg, I reminded him, might be obtained in our immediate neighbourhood by consulting a file of German journals, kept at a foreign coffee-house. By way of strengthening the good influence of this suggestion, I informed Fritz that I expected to be shortly sent to Frankfort, as the bearer of a business communication addressed to Mr. Keller by my aunt; and I offered privately to make

inquiries, and (if possible) even to take messages to Würzburg—if he would only engage to wait patiently for the brighter prospects that might show themselves in the time to come.

I had barely succeeded in tranquillising Fritz, when my attention was claimed by the more serious and pressing subject of the liberation of Jack Straw. My aunt sent to say that she wished to see me.

I found her at her writing-table, with the head-clerk established at the desk opposite.

Mr. Hartrey was quite as strongly opposed as the lawyer to any meddling with the treatment of mad people on the part of my aunt. But he placed his duty to his employer before all other considerations; and

he rendered, under respectful protest, such services as were required of him. He was now engaged in drawing out the necessary memorials and statements, under the instructions of my aunt. Her object in sending for me was to inquire if I objected to making fair copies of the rough drafts thus produced. In the present stage of the affair, she was unwilling to take the clerks at the office into her confidence. As a matter of course, I followed Mr. Hartrey's example, and duly subordinated my own opinions to my aunt's convenience.

On the next day, she paid her promised visit to poor Jack.

The bag which she had committed to his care was returned to her without the slightest injury. Naturally enough, she

welcomed this circumstance as offering a new encouragement to the design that she had in view. Mad Jack could not only understand a responsibility, but could prove himself worthy of it. The superintendent smiled, and said, in his finely ironical way, 'I never denied, madam, that Jack was cunning.'

From that date, my aunt's venturesome enterprise advanced towards completion with a rapidity that astonished us.

Applying, in the first instance, to the friend of her late husband, holding a position in the Royal Household, she was met once more by the inevitable objections to her design. She vainly pleaded that her purpose was to try the experiment modestly in the one pitiable case of Jack Straw, and

that she would willingly leave any further development of her husband's humane project to persons better qualified to encounter dangers and difficulties than herself. The only concession that she could obtain was an appointment for a second interview, in the presence of a gentleman whose opinion it would be important to consult. He was one of the physicians attached to the Court, and he was known to be a man of liberal views in his profession. Mrs. Wagner would do well, in her own interests, to be guided by his disinterested advice.

Keeping this second appointment, my aunt provided herself with a special means of persuasion in the shape of her husband's diary, containing his unfinished notes on the treatment of insanity by moral influence.

As she had anticipated, the physician invited to advise her was readier to read the notes than to listen to her own imperfect explanation of the object in view. He was strongly impressed by the novelty and good sense of the ideas that her husband advocated, and was candid enough openly to acknowledge it. But he, too, protested against any attempt on the part of a woman to carry out any part of the proposed reform, even on the smallest scale. Exasperated by these new remonstrances, my aunt's patience gave way. Refusing to submit herself to the physician's advice, she argued the question boldly from her own point of view. The discussion was at its height, when the door of the room was suddenly opened from without. A lady in

walking-costume appeared, with two ladies in attendance on her. The two gentlemen started to their feet, and whispered to my aunt, 'The Princess!'

This was the 'exalted personage' whom the superintendent at Bethlehem had been too discreet to describe more particularly as a daughter of George the Third. Passing the door on her way to the Palace-gardens, the Princess had heard the contending voices, and the name of Jack distinctly pronounced in a woman's tones. Inheriting unusually vigorous impulses of curiosity from her august father, her Highness opened the door and joined the party without ceremony.

'What are you quarrelling about?' inquired the Princess. 'And who is this lady?'

Mrs. Wagner was presented, to answer

for herself. She made the best of the golden opportunity that had fallen into her hands. The Princess was first astonished, then interested, then converted to my aunt's view of the case. In the monotonous routine of Court life, here was a romantic adventure in which even the King's daughter could take some share. Her Highness quoted Boadicea, Queen Elizabeth, and Joan of Arc, as women who had matched the men on their own ground—and complimented Mrs. Wagner as a heroine of the same type.

'You are a fine creature,' said the Princess, 'and you may trust to me to help you with all my heart. Come to my apartments to-morrow at this time—and tell poor Jack that I have not forgotten him.'

Assailed by Royal influence, all the

technical obstacles that lawyers, doctors, and governors could raise to the liberation of Jack Straw were set aside by an ingenious appeal to the letter of the law, originating in a suggestion made by the Princess herself.

'It lies in a nutshell, my dear,' said her Highness to my aunt. 'They tell me I broke the rules when I insisted on having Jack admitted to the Hospital. Now, your late husband was one of the governors; and you are his sole executor. Very good. As your husband's representative, complain of the violation of the rules, and insist on the discharge of Jack. He occupies a place which ought to be filled by an educated patient in a higher rank of life. Oh, never mind me! I shall express my regret for disregarding the regulations—and, to prove

my sincerity, I shall consent to the poor creature's dismissal, and assume the whole responsibility of providing for him myself. There is the way out of our difficulty. Take it—and you shall have Jack whenever you want him.'

In three weeks from that time, the 'dangerous lunatic' was free (as our friend the lawyer put it) to 'murder Mrs. Wagner, and to burn the house down.'

How my aunt's perilous experiment was conducted—in what particulars it succeeded and in what particulars it failed—I am unable to state as an eyewitness, owing to my absence at the time. This curious portion of the narrative will be found related by Jack himself, on a page still to come. In the meanwhile, the course of events

compels me to revert to the circumstances which led to my departure from London.

While Mrs. Wagner was still in attendance at the palace, a letter reached her from Mr. Keller, stating the necessity of increasing the number of clerks at the Frankfort branch of our business. Closely occupied as she then was, she found time to provide me with those instructions to her German partners, preparing them for the coming employment of women in their office, to which she had first alluded when the lawyer and I had our interview with her after the reading of the will.

'The cause of the women,' she said to me, 'must not suffer because I happen to be just now devoted to the cause of poor Jack. Go at once to Frankfort, David. I have

written enough to prepare my partners there for a change in the administration of the office, and to defer for the present the proposed enlargement of our staff of clerks. The rest you can yourself explain from your own knowledge of the plans that I have in contemplation. Start on your journey as soon as possible—and understand that you are to say No positively, if Fritz proposes to accompany you. He is not to leave London without the express permission of his father.'

Fritz did propose to accompany me, the moment he heard of my journey. I must own that I thought the circumstances excused him.

On the previous evening, we had consulted the German newspapers at the coffee-house, and had found news from Würzburg

which quite overwhelmed my excitable friend.

Being called upon to deliver their judgment, the authorities presiding at the legal inquiry into the violation of the seals and the loss of the medicine-chest failed to agree in opinion, and thus brought the investigation to a most unsatisfactory end. The moral effect of this division among the magistrates was unquestionably to cast a slur on the reputation of Widow Fontaine. She was not pronounced to be guilty—but she was also not declared to be innocent. Feeling, no doubt, that her position among her neighbours had now become unendurable, she and her daughter had left Würzburg. The newspaper narrative added that their departure had been privately accom-

plished. No information could be obtained of the place of their retreat.

But for this last circumstance, I believe Fritz would have insisted on travelling with me. Ignorant in what direction to begin the search for Minna and her mother, he consented to leave me to look for traces of them in Germany, while he remained behind to inquire at the different foreign hotels, on the chance that they might have taken refuge in London.

The next morning I started for Frankfort.

My spirits were high as I left the shores of England. I had a young man's hearty and natural enjoyment of change. Besides, it flattered my self-esteem to feel that I was my aunt's business-representative; and I

was almost equally proud to be Fritz's confidential friend. Never could any poor human creature have been a more innocent instrument of mischief in the hands of Destiny than I was, on that fatal journey. The day was dark, when the old weary way of travelling brought me at last to Frankfort. The unseen prospect, at the moment when I stepped out of the mail-post-carriage, was darker still.

CHAPTER IX.

I HAD just given a porter the necessary directions for taking my portmanteau to Mr. Keller's house, when I heard a woman's voice behind me asking the way to the Poste Restante—or, in our roundabout English phrase, the office of letters to be left till called for.

The voice was delightfully fresh and sweet, with an undertone of sadness, which made it additionally interesting. I did what most other young men in my place would have done—I looked round directly.

Yes! the promise of the voice was

abundantly kept by the person. She was quite a young girl, modest and ladylike; a little pale and careworn, poor thing, as if her experience of life had its sad side already. Her face was animated by soft sensitive eyes—the figure supple and slight, the dress of the plainest material, but so neatly made and so perfectly worn that I should have doubted her being a German girl, if I had not heard the purely South-German accent in which she put her question. It was answered, briefly and civilly, by the conductor of the post-carriage in which I had travelled. But, at that hour, the old court-yard of the post-office was thronged with people arriving and departing, meeting their friends and posting their letters. The girl was evidently not used to crowds. She

was nervous and confused. After advancing a few steps in the direction pointed out to her, she stopped in bewilderment, hustled by busy people, and evidently in doubt already about which way she was to turn next.

If I had followed the strict line of duty, I suppose I should have turned my steps in the direction of Mr. Keller's house. I followed my instincts instead, and offered my services to the young lady. Blame the laws of Nature and the attraction between the sexes. Don't blame me.

'I heard you asking for the post-office,' I said. 'Will you allow me to show you the way?'

She looked at me, and hesitated. I felt that I was paying the double penalty of

being a young man, and of being perhaps a little too eager as well.

'Forgive me for venturing to speak to you,' I pleaded. 'It is not very pleasant for a young lady to find herself alone in such a crowded place as this. I only ask permission to make myself of some trifling use to you.'

She looked at me again, and altered her first opinion.

'You are very kind, sir; I will thankfully accept your assistance.'

'May I offer you my arm?'

She declined this proposal—with perfect amiability, however. 'Thank you, sir, I will follow you, if you please.'

I pushed my way through the crowd, with the charming stranger close at my

heels. Arrived at the post-office, I drew aside to let her make her own inquiries. Would she mention her name? No; she handed in a passport, and asked if there was a letter waiting for the person named in it. The letter was found; but was not immediately delivered. As well as I could understand, the postage had been insufficiently paid, and the customary double-rate was due. The young lady searched in the pocket of her dress—a cry of alarm escaped her. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'I have lost my purse, and the letter is so important!'

It occurred to me immediately that she had had her pocket picked by some thief in the crowd. The clerk thought so too. He looked at the clock. 'You must be quick

about it if you return for the letter,' he said, 'the office closes in ten minutes.'

She clasped her hands in despair. 'It's more than ten minutes' walk,' she said, 'before I can get home.'

I immediately offered to lend her the money. 'It is such a very small sum,' I reminded her, 'that it would be absurd to consider yourself under any obligation to me.'

Between her eagerness to get possession of the letter, and her doubt of the propriety of accepting my offer, she looked sadly embarrassed, poor soul.

'You are very good to me,' she said confusedly; 'but I am afraid it might not be quite right in me to borrow money of a stranger, however little it may be. And,

even if I did venture, how am I——?' She looked at me shyly, and shrank from finishing the sentence.

'How are you to pay it back?' I suggested.

'Yes, sir.'

'Oh, it's not worth the trouble of paying back. Give it to the first poor person you meet with to-morrow.' I said this, with the intention of reconciling her to the loan of the money. It had exactly the contrary effect on this singularly delicate and scrupulous girl. She drew back a step directly.

'No, I couldn't do that,' she said. 'I could only accept your kindness, if——' She stopped again. The clerk looked once more at the clock. 'Make up your mind, Miss, before it's too late.'

In her terror of not getting the letter that day, she spoke out plainly at last. 'Will you kindly tell me, sir, to what address I can return the money when I get home?'

I paid for the letter first, and then answered the question.

'If you will be so good as to send it to Mr. Keller's house——'

Before I could add the name of the street, her pale face suddenly flushed. 'Oh!' she exclaimed impulsively, 'do you know Mr. Keller?'

A presentiment of the truth occurred to my mind for the first time.

'Yes,' I said; 'and his son Fritz too.'

She trembled; the colour that had risen in her face left it instantly; she looked away

from me with a pained, humiliated expression. Doubt was no longer possible. The charming stranger was Fritz's sweetheart—and 'Jezebel's Daughter.'

My respect for the young lady forbade me to attempt any concealment of the discovery that I had made. I said at once, 'I believe I have the honour of speaking to Miss Minna Fontaine?'

She looked at me in wonder, not unmixed with distrust.

'How do you know who I am?' she asked.

'I can easily tell you, Miss Minna. I am David Glenney, nephew of Mrs. Wagner, of London. Fritz is staying in her house, and he and I have talked about you by the hour together.'

The poor girl's face, so pale and sad the moment before, became radiant with happiness. 'Oh!' she cried innocently, 'has Fritz not forgotten me?'

Even at this distance of time, my memory recalls her lovely dark eyes riveted in breathless interest on my face, as I spoke of Fritz's love and devotion, and told her that she was still the one dear image in his thoughts by day, in his dreams by night. All her shyness vanished. She impulsively gave me her hand. 'How can I be grateful enough to the good angel who has brought us together!' she exclaimed. 'If we were not in the street, I do believe, Mr. David, I should go down on my knees to thank you! You have made me the happiest girl living.' Her voice suddenly failed her; she

drew her veil down. 'Don't mind me,' she said; 'I can't help crying for joy.'

Shall I confess what my emotions were? For the moment, I forgot my own little love affair in England—and envied Fritz from the bottom of my heart.

The chance-passengers in the street began to pause and look at us. I offered Minna my arm, and asked permission to attend her on the way home.

'I should like it,' she answered, with a friendly frankness that charmed me. 'But you are expected at Mr. Keller's—you must go there first.'

'May I call and see you to-morrow?' I persisted, 'and save you the trouble of sending my money to Mr. Keller's?'

She lifted her veil and smiled at me

brightly through her tears. 'Yes,' she said; 'come to-morrow and be introduced to my mother. Oh! how glad my dear mother will be to see you, when I tell her what has happened! I am a selfish wretch; I have not borne my sorrow and suspense as I ought; I have made her miserable about me, because I was miserable about Fritz. It's all over now. Thank you again and again. There is our address on that card. No, no, we must say good-bye till to-morrow. My mother is waiting for her letter; and Mr. Keller is wondering what has become of you.' She pressed my hand warmly and left me.

On my way alone to Mr. Keller's house, I was not quite satisfied with myself. The fear occurred to me that I might have spoken

about Fritz a little too freely, and might have excited hopes which could never be realised. The contemplation of the doubtful future began to oppress my mind. Minna might have reason to regret that she had ever met with me.

I was received by Mr. Keller with truly German cordiality. He and his partner Mr. Engelman—one a widower, the other an old bachelor—lived together in the ancient building, in Main Street, near the river, which served for house and for offices alike.

The two old gentlemen offered the completest personal contrast imaginable. Mr. Keller was lean, tall, and wiry—a man of considerable attainments beyond the limits of his business, capable (when his hot tem-

per was not excited) of speaking sensibly and strongly on any subject in which he was interested. Mr. Engelman, short and fat, devoted to the office during the hours of business, had never read a book in his life, and had no aspiration beyond the limits of his garden and his pipe. 'In my leisure moments,' he used to say, 'give me my flowers, my pipe, and my peace of mind—and I ask no more.' Widely as they differed in character, the two partners had the truest regard for one another. Mr. Engelman believed Mr. Keller to be the most accomplished and remarkable man in Germany. Mr. Keller was as firmly persuaded, on his side, that Mr. Engelman was an angel in sweetness of temper, and a model of modest and unassuming good sense. Mr. Engelman

listened to Mr. Keller's learned talk with an ignorant admiration which knew no limit. Mr. Keller, detesting tobacco in all its forms, and taking no sort of interest in horticulture, submitted to the fumes of Mr. Engelman's pipe, and passed hours in Mr. Engelman's garden without knowing the names of nine-tenths of the flowers that grew in it. There are still such men to be found in Germany and in England; but, oh! dear me, the older I get the fewer I find there are of them.

The two old friends and partners were waiting for me to join them at their early German supper. Specimens of Mr. Engelman's flowers adorned the table in honour of my arrival. He presented me with a rose from the nosegay when I entered the room.

'And how did you leave dear Mrs. Wagner?' he inquired.

'And how is my boy Fritz?' asked Mr. Keller.

I answered in terms which satisfied them both, and the supper proceeded gaily. But when the table was cleared, and Mr. Engelman had lit his pipe, and I had kept him company with a cigar, then Mr. Keller put the fatal question. 'And now tell me, David, do you come to us on business or do you come to us on pleasure?'

I had no alternative but to produce my instructions, and to announce the contemplated invasion of the office by a select army of female clerks. The effect produced by the disclosure was highly characteristic of

the widely different temperaments of the two partners.

Mild Mr. Engelman laid down his pipe, and looked at Mr. Keller in helpless silence.

Irritable Mr. Keller struck his fist on the table, and appealed to Mr. Engelman with fury in his looks.

'What did I tell you,' he asked, 'when we first heard that Mr. Wagner's widow was appointed head-partner in the business? How many opinions of philosophers on the moral and physical incapacities of women did I quote? Did I, or did I not, begin with the ancient Egyptians, and end with Doctor Bernastrokius, our neighbour in the next street?'

Poor Mr. Engelman looked frightened.

'Don't be angry, my dear friend,' he said softly.

'Angry?' repeated Mr. Keller, more furiously than ever. 'My good Engelman, you never were more absurdly mistaken in your life! I am delighted. Exactly what I expected, exactly what I predicted, has come to pass. Put down your pipe! I can bear a great deal—but tobacco smoke is beyond me at such a crisis as this. And do for once overcome your constitutional indolence. Consult your memory; recall my own words when we were first informed that we had a woman for head-partner.'

'She was a very pretty woman when I first saw her,' Mr. Engelman remarked.

'Pooh!' cried Mr. Keller.

'I didn't mean to offend you,' said Mr.

Engelman. 'Allow me to present you with one of my roses as a peace-offering.'

'*Will* you be quiet, and let me speak?'

'My dear Keller, I am always too glad to hear you speak! You put ideas into my poor head, and my poor head lets them out, and then you put them in again. What noble perseverance! If I live a while longer I do really think you will make a clever man of me. Let me put the rose in your buttonhole for you. And I say, I wish you would allow me to go on with my pipe.'

Mr. Keller made a gesture of resignation, and gave up his partner in despair. 'I appeal to *you*, David,' he said, and poured the full flow of his learning and his indignation into my unlucky ears.

Mr. Engelman, enveloped in clouds of

tobacco-smoke, enjoyed in silence the composing influence of his pipe. I said, 'Yes, sir,' and, 'No, sir,' at the right intervals in the flow of Mr. Keller's eloquence. At this distance of time, I cannot pretend to report the long harangue of which I was made the victim. In substance, Mr. Keller held that there were two irremediable vices in the composition of women. Their dispositions presented, morally speaking, a disastrous mixture of the imitativeness of a monkey and the restlessness of a child. Having proved this by copious references to the highest authorities, Mr. Keller logically claimed my aunt as a woman, and, as such, not only incapable of 'letting well alone,' but naturally disposed to imitate her husband on the most superficial and defective sides of his charac-

ter. 'I predicted, David, that the fatal disturbance of our steady old business was now only a question of time—and there, in Mrs. Wagner's ridiculous instructions, is the fulfilment of my prophecy!'

Before we went to bed that night, the partners arrived at two resolutions. Mr. Keller resolved to address a written remonstrance to my aunt. Mr. Engelman resolved to show me his garden the first thing in the morning.

CHAPTER X.

On the afternoon of the next day, while my two good friends were still occupied by the duties of the office, I stole out to pay my promised visit to Minna and Minna's mother.

It was impossible not to arrive at the conclusion that they were indeed in straitened circumstances. Their lodgings were in the cheap suburban quarter of Frankfort on the left bank of the river. Everything was scrupulously neat, and the poor furniture was arranged with taste—but no dexterity of management could disguise the squalid shabbiness of the sitting-room into which I

was shown. I could not help thinking how distressed Fritz would feel, if he could have seen his charming Minna in a place so unworthy of her as this.

The rickety door opened, and the 'Jezebel' of the anonymous letter (followed by her daughter) entered the room.

There are certain remarkable women in all countries who, whatever sphere they may be seen in, fill that sphere as completely as a great actor fills the stage. Widow Fontaine was one of these noteworthy persons. The wretched little room seemed to disappear when she softly glided into it; and even the pretty Minna herself receded into partial obscurity in her mother's presence. And yet there was nothing in the least obtrusive in the manner of Madame Fontaine, and nothing

remarkable in her stature. Her figure, reaching to no more than the middle height, was the well-rounded figure of a woman approaching forty years of age. The influence she exercised was, in part, attributable, as I suppose, to the supple grace of all her movements; in part, to the commanding composure of her expression and the indescribable witchery of her manner. Her dark eyes, never fully opened in my remembrance, looked at me under heavy overhanging upper eyelids. Her enemies saw something sensual in their strange expression. To my mind it was rather something furtively cruel—except when she looked at her daughter. Sensuality shows itself most plainly in the excessive development of the lower part of the face. Madame Fontaine's lips were thin,

and her chin was too small. Her profuse black hair was just beginning to be streaked with grey. Her complexion wanted colour. In spite of these drawbacks, she was still a striking, I might almost say a startling, creature, when you first looked at her. And, though she only wore the plainest widow's weeds, I don't scruple to assert that she was the most perfectly dressed woman I ever saw.

Minna made a modest attempt to present me in due form. Her mother put her aside playfully, and held out both her long white powerful hands to me as cordially as if we had known each other for years.

'I wait to prove other people before I accept them for my friends,' she said. 'Mr. David, you have been more than kind to my

daughter—and *you* are my friend at our first meeting.'

I believe I repeat the words exactly. I wish I could give any adequate idea of the exquisite charm of voice and manner which accompanied them.

And yet, I was not at my ease with her —I was not drawn to her irresistibly, as I had felt drawn to her daughter. Those dark, steady, heavy-lidded eyes of hers seemed to be looking straight into my heart, and surprising all my secrets. To say that I actually distrusted and disliked her would be far from the truth. Distrust and dislike would have protected me, in some degree at least, from feeling her influence as I certainly did feel it. How that influence was exerted —whether it was through her eyes, or

through her manner, or, to speak the jargon of these latter days, through some 'magnetic emanation' from her, which invisibly overpowered me—is more than I can possibly say. I can only report that she contrived by slow degrees to subject the action of my will more and more completely to the action of hers, until I found myself answering her most insidious questions as unreservedly as if she had been in very truth my intimate and trusted friend.'

'And is this your first visit to Frankfort, Mr. David?' she began.

'Oh, no, madam! I have been at Frankfort on two former occasions.'

'Ah, indeed? And have you always stayed with Mr. Keller?'

'Always.'

She looked unaccountably interested when she heard that reply, brief as it was.

'Then, of course, you are intimate with him,' she said. 'Intimate enough, perhaps, to ask a favour or to introduce a friend?'

I made a futile attempt to answer this cautiously.

'As intimate, madam, as a young clerk in the business can hope to be with a partner,' I said.

'A clerk in the business?' she repeated. 'I thought you lived in London, with your aunt.'

Here Minna interposed for the first time.

'You forget, mamma, that there are three names in the business. The inscription over the door in Main Street is Wagner, Keller, and Engelman. Fritz once told me

that the office here in Frankfort was only the small office—and the grand business was Mr. Wagner's business in London. Am I right, Mr. David?'

'Quite right, Miss Minna. But we have no such magnificent flower-garden at the London house as Mr. Engelman's flower-garden here. May I offer you a nosegay which he allowed me to gather?'

I had hoped to make the flowers a means of turning the conversation to more interesting topics. But the widow resumed her questions, while Minna was admiring the flowers.

'Then you are Mr. Wagner's clerk?' she persisted.

'I *was* Mr. Wagner's clerk. Mr. Wagner is dead.'

'Ha! And who takes care of the great business now?'

Without well knowing why, I felt a certain reluctance to speak of my aunt and her affairs. But Widow Fontaine's eyes rested on me with a resolute expectation in them which I felt myself compelled to gratify. When she understood that Mr. Wagner's widow was now the chief authority in the business, her curiosity to hear everything that I could tell her about my aunt became all but insatiable. Minna's interest in the subject was, in quite another way, as vivid as her mother's. My aunt's house was the place to which cruel Mr. Keller had banished her lover. The inquiries of the mother and daughter followed each other in such rapid succession that I cannot pretend to remember them now. The last question alone

remains vividly impressed on my memory, in connection with the unexpected effect which my answer produced. It was put by the widow in these words:

'Your aunt is interested, of course, in the affairs of her partners in this place. Is it possible, Mr. David, that she may one day take the journey to Frankfort?'

'It is quite likely, madam, that my aunt may be in Frankfort on business before the end of the year.'

As I replied in those terms the widow looked round slowly at her daughter. Minna was evidently quite as much at a loss to understand the look as I was. Madame Fontaine turned to me again, and made an apology.

'Pardon me, Mr. David, there is a little

domestic duty that I had forgotten.' She crossed the room to a small table, on which writing-materials were placed, wrote a few lines, and handed the paper, without enclosing it, to Minna. 'Give that, my love, to our good friend downstairs—and, while you are in the kitchen, suppose you make the tea. You will stay and drink tea with us, Mr. David? It is our only luxury, and we always make it ourselves.'

My first impulse was to find an excuse for declining the invitation. There was something in the air of mystery with which Madame Fontaine performed her domestic duties that was not at all to my taste. But Minna pleaded with me to say Yes. 'Do stay with us a little longer,' she said, in her innocently frank way, 'we have so

few pleasures in this place.' I might, perhaps, have even resisted Minna—but her mother literally laid hands on me. She seated herself, with the air of an empress, on a shabby little sofa in the corner of the room, and beckoning to me to take my place by her side, laid her cool firm hand persuasively on mine. Her touch filled me with a strange sense of disturbance, half pleasurable, half painful—I don't know how to describe it. Let me only record that I yielded, and that Minna left us together.

'I want to tell you the whole truth,' said Madame Fontaine, as soon as we were alone; 'and I can only do so in the absence of my daughter. You must have seen for yourself that we are very poor?'

Her hand pressed mine gently. I

answered as delicately as could—I said I was sorry, but not surprised, to hear it.

'When you kindly helped Minna to get that letter yesterday,' she went on, 'you were the innocent means of inflicting a disappointment on me—one disappointment more, after others that had gone before it. I came here to place my case before some wealthy relatives of mine in this city. They refused to assist me. I wrote next to other members of my family, living in Brussels. The letter of yesterday contained their answer. Another refusal! The landlady of this house is an afflicted creature, with every claim on my sympathies; she, too, is struggling with poverty. If I failed to pay her, it would be too cruel. Only yesterday I felt it my hard duty to give

her notice of our departure in a week more. I have just written to recall that notice. The reason is, that I see a gleam of hope in the future—and you, Mr. David, are the friend who has shown it to me.'

I was more than surprised at this. 'May I ask how?' I said.

She patted my hand with a playful assumption of petulance.

'A little more patience,' she rejoined; 'and you shall soon hear. If I had only myself to think of, I should not feel the anxieties that now trouble me. I could take a housekeeper's place to-morrow. Yes! I was brought up among surroundings of luxury and refinement; I descended in rank when I married—but for all that, I could fill a domestic employment without

repining at my lot, without losing my self-respect. Adversity is a hard teacher of sound lessons, David. May I call you David? And if you heard of a housekeeper's place vacant, would you tell me of it?'

I could hardly understand whether she was in jest or in earnest. She went on without waiting for me to reply.

'But I have my daughter to think of,' she resumed, 'and to add to my anxieties my daughter has given her heart to Mr. Keller's son. While I and my dear Minna had only our own interests to consider, we might have earned our daily bread together; we might have faced the future with courage. But what might once have been the calm course of our lives is now troubled by a third

person—a rival with me in my daughter's love—and, worse still, a man who is forbidden to marry her. Is it wonderful that I feel baffled, disheartened, helpless? Oh, I am not exaggerating! I know my child's nature. She is too delicate, too exquisitely sensitive, for the rough world she lives in. When she loves, she loves with all her heart and soul. Day by day I have seen her pining and fading under her separation from Fritz. You have revived her hopes for the moment—but the prospect before her remains unaltered. If she loses Fritz she will die of a broken heart. Oh, God! the one creature I love—and how I am to help her and save her I don't know!'

For the first time, I heard the fervour of true feeling in her voice. She turned aside

from me, and hid her face with a wild gesture of despair that was really terrible to see. I tried, honestly tried, to comfort her.

'Of one thing at least you may be sure.' I said. 'Fritz's whole heart is given to your daughter. He will be true to her, and worthy of her, through all trials.'

'I don't doubt it,' she answered sadly, 'I have nothing to say against my girl's choice. Fritz is good, and Fritz is true, as you say. But you forget his father. Personally, mind, I despise Mr. Keller.' She looked round at me with unutterable contempt flashing through the tears that filled her eyes. 'A man who listens to every lie that scandal can utter against the character of a helpless woman—who gives her no opportunity of defending herself (I have

written to him, and received no answer)—who declares that his son shall never marry my daughter (because we are poor, of course); and who uses attacks on my reputation which he has never verified, as the excuse for his brutal conduct—can anybody respect such a man as that? And yet on this despicable creature my child's happiness and my child's life depend! For her sake, no matter what my own feeling may be, I must stoop to defend myself. I must make my opportunity of combating his cowardly prejudice, and winning his good opinion in spite of himself. How am I to get a hearing? how am I to approach him? I understand that *you* are not in a position to help me. But you have done wonders for me nevertheless, and God bless you for it!'

She lifted my hand to her lips. I foresaw what was coming; I tried to speak. But she gave me no opportunity; her eloquent enthusiasm rushed into a new flow of words.

'Yes, my best of friends, my wisest of advisers,' she went on; 'you have suggested the irresistible interference of a person whose authority is supreme. Your excellent aunt is the head of the business; Mr. Keller *must* listen to his charming chief. There is my gleam of hope. On that chance, I will sell the last few valuables I possess, and wait till Mrs. Wagner arrives at Frankfort. You start, David! What is there to alarm you? Do you suppose me capable of presuming on your aunt's kindness—of begging for favours which it may not be perfectly

easy for her to grant? Mrs. Wagner knows already from Fritz what our situation is. Let her only see my Minna; I won't intrude on her myself. My daughter shall plead for me; my daughter shall ask for all I want—an interview with Mr. Keller, and permission to speak in my own defence. Tell me, honestly, am I expecting too much, if I hope that your aunt will persuade Fritz's father to see me?'

It sounded modestly enough in words. But I had my own doubts, nevertheless.

I had left Mr. Keller working hard at his protest against the employment of women in the office, to be sent to my aunt by that day's post. Knowing them both as I did, I thought it at least probable that a written controversy might be succeeded by a personal estrangement. If Mr. Keller proved

obstinate, Mrs. Wagner would soon show him that she had a will of her own. Under those circumstances, no favours could be asked, no favours could be granted—and poor Minna's prospects would be darker than ever.

This was one view of the case. I must own, however, that another impression had been produced on me. Something in Madame Fontaine's manner suggested that she might not be quite so modest in her demands on my aunt, when they met at Frankfort, as she had led me to believe. I was vexed with myself for having spoken too unreservedly, and was quite at a loss to decide what I ought to say in answer to the appeal that had been made to me. In this state of perplexity I was relieved by a welcome interruption. Minna's voice reached us from

the landing outside. 'I have both hands engaged,' she said; 'please let me in.'

I ran to the door. The widow laid her finger on her lips. 'Not a word, mind, to Minna!' she whispered. 'We understand each other—don't we?'

I said, 'Yes, certainly.' And so the subject was dropped for the rest of the evening.

The charming girl came in carrying the tea-tray. She especially directed my attention to a cake which she had made that day with her own hands. 'I can cook,' she said, 'and I can make my own dresses—and if Fritz is a poor man when he marries me, I can save him the expense of a servant.' Our talk at the tea-table was, I dare say, too trifling to be recorded. I only remem-

ber that I enjoyed it. Later in the evening, Minna sang to me. I heard one of those simple German ballads again, not long since, and the music brought the tears into my eyes.

The moon rose early that night. When I looked at my watch, I found that it was time to go. Minna was at the window, admiring the moonlight. 'On such a beautiful night,' she said, 'it seems a shame to stay indoors. Do let us walk a part of the way back with Mr. David, mamma! Only as far as the bridge, to see the moon on the river.'

Her mother consented, and we three left the house together.

Arrived at the bridge, we paused to look at the view. But the clouds were rising

already, and the moonlight only showed itself at intervals. Madame Fontaine said she smelt rain in the air, and took her daughter's arm to go home. I offered to return with them as far as their own door; but they positively declined to delay me on my way back. It was arranged that I should call on them again in a day or two.

Just as we were saying good-night, the fitful moonlight streamed out brightly again through a rift in the clouds. At the same moment a stout old gentleman, smoking a pipe, sauntered past us on the pavement, noticed me as he went by, stopped directly, and revealed himself as Mr. Engelman. 'Good-night, Mr. David,' said the widow. The moon shone full on her as she gave me her hand; Minna standing behind her in

the shadow. In a moment more the two ladies had left us.

Mr. Engelman's eyes followed the smoothly gliding figure of the widow, until it was lost to view at the end of the bridge. He laid his hand eagerly on my arm. 'David!' he said, 'who is that glorious creature?'

'Which of the two ladies do you mean?' I asked, mischievously.

'The one with the widow's cap, of course!'

'Do you admire the widow, sir?'

'Admire her!' repeated Mr. Engelman. 'Look here, David!' He showed me the long porcelain bowl of his pipe. 'My dear boy, she has done what no woman ever did with me yet—she has put my pipe out!'

CHAPTER XI.

THERE was something so absurd in the association of Madame Fontaine's charms with the extinction of Mr. Engelman's pipe, that I burst out laughing. My good old friend looked at me in grave surprise.

'What is there to laugh at in my forgetting to keep my pipe alight?' he asked. 'My whole mind, David, was absorbed in that magnificent woman the instant I set eyes on her. The image of her is before me at this moment—an image of an angel in moonlight. Am I speaking poetically for the first time in my life? I shouldn't

wonder. I really don't know what is the matter with me. You are a young man, and perhaps you can tell. Have I fallen in love, as the saying is?' He took me confidentially by the arm, before I could answer this formidable question. 'Don't tell friend Keller!' he said, with a sudden outburst of alarm. 'Keller is an excellent man, but he has no mercy on sinners. I say, David! couldn't you introduce me to her?'

Still haunted by the fear that I had spoken too unreservedly during my interview with the widow, I was in the right humour to exhibit extraordinary prudence in my intercourse with Mr. Engelman.

'I couldn't venture to introduce you,' I said; 'the lady is living here in the strictest retirement.'

'At any rate, you can tell me her name,' pleaded Mr. Engelman. 'I dare say you have mentioned it to Keller?'

'I have done nothing of the sort. I have reasons for saying nothing about the lady to Mr. Keller.'

'Well, you can trust me to keep the secret, David. Come! I only want to send her some flowers from my garden. She can't object to that. Tell me where I am to send my nosegay, there's a dear fellow.'

I dare say I did wrong—indeed, judging by later events, I *know* I did wrong. But I could not view the affair seriously enough to hold out against Mr. Engelman in the matter of the nosegay. He started when I mentioned the widow's name.

'Not the mother of the girl whom Fritz wants to marry?' he exclaimed.

'Yes, the same. Don't you admire Fritz's taste? Isn't Miss Minna a charming girl?'

'I can't say, David. I was bewitched—I had no eyes for anybody but her mother. Do you think Madame Fontaine noticed me?'

'Oh, yes. I saw her look at you.'

'Turn this way, David. The effect of the moonlight on *you* seems to make you look younger. Has it the same effect on me? How old should you guess me to be to-night? Fifty or sixty?'

'Somewhere between the two, sir.'

(He was close on seventy. But who could have been cruel enough to say so, at that moment?)

My answer proved to be so encouraging to the old gentleman that he ventured on the subject of Madame Fontaine's late husband. 'Was she very fond of him, David? What sort of man was he?'

I informed him that I had never even seen Dr. Fontaine; and then, by way of changing the topic, inquired if I was too late for the regular supper-hour at Main Street.

'My dear boy, the table was cleared half an hour ago. But I persuaded our sour-tempered old housekeeper to keep something hot for you. You won't find Keller very amiable to-night, David. He was upset, to begin with, by writing that remonstrance to your aunt—and then your absence annoyed him. "This is treating our house like an

hotel; I won't allow anybody to take such liberties with us." Yes! that was really what he said of you. He was so cross, poor fellow, that I left him, and went out for a stroll on the bridge. And met my fate,' added poor Mr. Engelman, in the saddest tones I had ever heard fall from his lips.

My reception at the house was a little chilly.

'I have written my mind plainly to your aunt,' said Mr. Keller; 'you will probably be recalled to London by return of post. In the meantime, on the next occasion when you spend the evening out, be so obliging as to leave word to that effect with one of the servants.' The crabbed old housekeeper (known in the domestic circle as Mother Barbara) had her fling at me next. She set

down the dish which she had kept hot for me, with a bang that tried the resisting capacity of the porcelain severely. 'I've done it this once,' she said. 'Next time you're late, you and the dog can sup together.'

The next day, I wrote to my aunt, and also to Fritz, knowing how anxious he must be to hear from me.

To tell him the whole truth would probably have been to bring him to Frankfort as fast as sailing-vessels and horses could carry him. All I could venture to say was, that I had found the lost trace of Minna and her mother, and that I had every reason to believe there was no cause to feel any present anxiety about them. I added that I might be in a position to forward a letter

secretly, if it would comfort him to write to his sweetheart.

In making this offer, I was, no doubt, encouraging my friend to disobey the plain commands which his father had laid on him.

But, as the case stood, I had really no other alternative. With Fritz's temperament, it would have been simply impossible to induce him to remain in London, unless his patience was sustained in my absence by a practical concession of some kind. In the interests of peace, then—and I must own in the interests of the pretty and interesting Minna as well—I consented to become a medium for correspondence, on the purely Jesuitical principle that the end justified the means. I had promised to let Minna know of it when I wrote to Fritz. My time

being entirely at my own disposal, until the vexed question of the employment of women was settled between Mr. Keller and my aunt, I went to the widow's lodgings, after putting my letters in the post.

Having made Minna happy in the anticipation of hearing from Fritz, I had leisure to notice an old china punch-bowl on the table, filled to overflowing with magnificent flowers. To anyone who knew Mr. Engelman as well as I did, the punch-bowl suggested serious considerations. He, who forbade the plucking of a single flower on ordinary occasions, must, with his own hands, have seriously damaged the appearance of his beautiful garden.

'What splendid flowers!' I said, feeling my way cautiously. 'Mr. Engelman him-

self might be envious of such a nosegay as that.'

The widow's heavy eyelids drooped lower for a moment, in unconcealed contempt for my simplicity.

'Do you really think you can mystify *me?*' she asked ironically. 'Mr. Engelman has done more than send the flowers—he has written me a too-flattering note. And I,' she said, glancing carelessly at the mantelpiece, on which a letter was placed, 'have written the necessary acknowledgment. It would be absurd to stand on ceremony with the harmless old gentleman who met us on the bridge. How fat he is! and what a wonderful pipe he carries—almost as fat as himself!'

Alas for Mr. Engelman! I could not

resist saying a word in his favour—she spoke of him with such cruelly sincere contempt.

'Though he only saw you for a moment,' I said, 'he is your ardent admirer already.'

'Is he indeed?' She was so utterly indifferent to Mr. Engelman's admiration that she could hardly take the trouble to make that commonplace reply. The next moment she dismissed the subject. 'So you have written to Fritz?' she went on. 'Have you also written to your aunt?'

'Yes, by the same post.'

'Mainly on business, no doubt? Is it indiscreet to ask if you slipped in a little word about the hopes that I associate with Mrs. Wagner's arrival at Frankfort?'

This seemed to give me a good oppor-

tunity of moderating her 'hopes,' in mercy to her daughter and to herself.

'I thought it undesirable to mention the subject—for the present, at least,' I answered. 'There is a serious difference of opinion between Mrs. Wagner and Mr. Keller, on a subject connected with the management of the office here. I say serious, because they are both equally firm in maintaining their convictions. Mr. Keller has written to my aunt by yesterday's post; and I fear it may end in an angry correspondence between them.'

I saw that I had startled her. She suddenly drew her chair close to mine.

'Do you think the correspondence will delay your aunt's departure from England?' she asked.

'On the contrary. My aunt is a very resolute person, and it may hasten her departure. But I am afraid it will indispose her to ask any favours of Mr. Keller, or to associate herself with his personal concerns. Any friendly intercourse between them will indeed be impossible, if she asserts her authority as head-partner, and forces him to submit to a woman in a matter of business.'

She sank back in her chair. 'I understand,' she said faintly.

While we had been talking, Minna had walked to the window, and had remained there looking out. She suddenly turned round as her mother spoke.

'Mamma! the landlady's little boy has just gone out. Shall I tap at the window and call him back?'

The widow roused herself with an effort. 'What for, my love?' she asked, absently.

Minna pointed to the mantelpiece. 'To take your letter to Mr. Engelman, mamma.' Madame Fontaine looked at the letter—paused for a moment—and answered, 'No, my dear; let the boy go. It doesn't matter for the present.'

She turned to me, with an abrupt recovery of her customary manner.

'I am fortunately, for myself, a sanguine person,' she resumed. 'I always did hope for the best; and (feeling the kind motive of what you have said to me) I shall hope for the best still. Minna, my darling, Mr. David and I have been talking on dry subjects until we are tired. Give us a little music.'

While her daughter obediently opened the piano, she looked at the flowers. 'You are fond of flowers, David?' she went on. 'Do you understand the subject? I ignorantly admire the lovely colours, and enjoy the delicious scents—and I can do no more. It was really very kind of your old friend Mr. Engelman. Does he take any part in this deplorable difference of opinion between your aunt and Mr. Keller?'

What did that new allusion to Mr. Engelman mean? And why had she declined to despatch her letter to him, when the opportunity offered of sending it by the boy?

Troubled by the doubts which these considerations suggested, I committed an act of imprudence—I replied so reservedly that I

put her on her guard. All I said was that I supposed Mr. Engelman agreed with Mr. Keller, but that I was not in the confidence of the two partners. From that moment she saw through me, and was silent on the subject of Mr. Engelman. Even Minna's singing had lost its charm, in my present frame of mind. It was a relief to me when I could make my excuses, and leave the house.

On my way back to Main Street, when I could think freely, my doubts began to develop into downright suspicion. Madame Fontaine could hardly hope, after what I had told her, to obtain the all-important interview with Mr. Keller, through my aunt's intercession. Had she seen her way to trying what Mr. Engelman's influence with his

partner could do for her? Would she destroy her formal acknowledgment of the receipt of his flowers, as soon as my back was turned, and send him a second letter, encouraging him to visit her? And would she cast him off, without ceremony, when he had served her purpose?

These were the thoughts that troubled me on my return to the house. When we met at supper, some hours later, my worst anticipations were realised. Poor innocent Mr. Engelman was dressed with extraordinary smartness, and was in the highest good spirits. Mr. Keller asked him jestingly if he was going to be married. In the intoxication of happiness that possessed him, he was quite reckless; he actually retorted by a joke on the sore subject of the employment of

women! 'Who knows what may happen,' he cried gaily, 'when we have young ladies in the office for clerks?' Mr. Keller was so angry that he kept silence through the whole of our meal. When Mr. Engelman left the room I slipped out after him.

'You are going to Madame Fontaine's,' I said.

He smirked and smiled. 'Just a little evening visit, David. Aha! you young men are not to have it all your own way.' He laid his hand tenderly on the left breast-pocket of his coat. 'Such a delightful letter!' he said. 'It is here, over my heart. No a woman's sentiments are sacred; I mustn't show it to you.'

I was on the point of telling him the whole truth, when the thought of Minna

checked me for the time. My interest in preserving Mr. Engelman's tranquillity was in direct conflict with my interest in the speedy marriage of my good friend Fritz. Besides, was it likely that anything I could say would have the slightest effect on the deluded old man, in the first fervour of his infatuation? I thought I would give him a general caution, and wait to be guided by events.

'One word, sir, for your private ear,' I said. 'Even the finest women have their faults. You will find Madame Fontaine perfectly charming; but don't be too ready to believe that she is in earnest.'

Mr. Engelman felt infinitely flattered, and owned it without the slightest reserve.

'Oh, David! David!' he said, 'are you jealous of me already?'

He put on his hat (with a jaunty twist on one side), and swung his stick gaily, and left the room. For the first time, in my experience of him, he went out without his pipe; and (a more serious symptom still) he really did not appear to miss it.

CHAPTER XII.

Two days passed, and I perceived another change in Mr. Engelman.

He was now transformed into a serious and reticent man. Had he committed indiscretions which might expose him to ridicule if they were known? Or had the widow warned him not to be too ready to take me into his confidence? In any case, he said not one word to me about Madame Fontaine's reception of him, and he left the house secretly when he paid his next visit to her. Having no wish to meet him unexpectedly, and feeling (if the truth must be told) not

quite at ease about the future, I kept away from Minna and her mother, and waited for events.

On the third day, an event happened. I received a little note from Minna:—

'Dear Mr. David,—If you care to see mamma and me, stay at home this evening. Good Mr. Engelman has promised to show us his interesting old house, after business hours.'

There was nothing extraordinary in making an exhibition of 'the old house.' It was one among the many picturesque specimens of the domestic architecture of bygone days, for which Frankfort is famous; and it had been sketched by artists of all nations, both outside and in. At the same time, it was noticeable (perhaps only as a coinci-

dence) that the evening chosen for showing the house to the widow, was also the evening on which Mr. Keller had an engagement with some friends in another part of the city.

As the hour approached for the arrival of the ladies, I saw that Mr. Engelman looked at me with an expression of embarrassment.

'Are you not going out this evening, David?' he asked.

'Am I in the way, sir?' I inquired mischievously.

'Oh, no!'

'In that case then, I think I shall stay at home.'

He said no more, and walked up and down the room with an air of annoyance.

The bell of the street-door rang. He stopped, and looked at me again.

'Visitors?' I said.

He was obliged to answer me. 'Friends of mine, David, who are coming to see the house.'

I was just sufficiently irritated by his persistence in keeping up the mystery to set him the example of speaking plainly.

'Madame Fontaine and her daughter?' I said.

He turned quickly to answer me, and hesitated. At the same moment, the door was opened by the sour old housekeeper, frowning suspiciously at the two elegantly-dressed ladies whom she ushered into the room.

If I had been free to act on my own

impulse, I should certainly (out of regard for Mr. Engelman) have refrained from accompanying the visitors when they were shown over the house. But Minna took my arm. I had no choice but to follow Mr. Engelman and her mother when they left the room.

Minna spoke to me as confidentially as if I had been her brother.

'Do you know,' she whispered, 'that nice old gentleman and mamma are like old friends already. Mamma is generally suspicious of strangers. Isn't it odd? And she actually invites him to bring his pipe when he comes to see us! He sits puffing smoke, and admiring mamma—and mamma does all the talking. Do come and see us soon! I have nobody to speak to about

Fritz. Mamma and Mr. Engelman take no more notice of me than if I was a little dog in the room.'

As we passed from the ground floor to the first floor, Madame Fontaine's admiration of the house rose from one climax of enthusiasm to another. Among the many subjects that she understood, the domestic architecture of the seventeenth century seemed to be one, and the art of water-colour painting soon proved to be another.

'I am not quite contemptible as a lady-artist,' I heard her say to Mr. Engelman; 'and I should so like to make some little studies of these beautiful old rooms—as memorials to take with me when I am far away from Frankfort. But I don't ask it, dear Mr. Engelman. You don't want enthu-

siastic ladies with sketch-books in this bachelor paradise of yours. I hope we are not intruding on Mr. Keller. Is he at home?'

'No,' said Mr. Engelman; 'he has gone out.'

Madame Fontaine's flow of eloquence suddenly ran dry. She was silent as we ascended from the first floor to the second. In this part of the house our bedrooms were situated. The chamber in which I slept presented nothing particularly worthy of notice. But the rooms occupied by Mr. Keller and Mr. Engelman contained some of the finest carved woodwork in the house.

It was beginning to get dark. Mr. Engelman lit the candles in his own room. The widow took one of them from him, and

threw the light skilfully on the different objects about her. She was still a little subdued; but she showed her knowledge of wood-carving by picking out the two finest specimens in the room—a wardrobe and a toilet-table.

'My poor husband was fond of old carving,' she explained modestly; 'what I know about it, I know from him. Dear Mr. Engelman, your room is a picture in itself. What glorious colours! How simple and how grand! Might we——' she paused, with a becoming appearance of confusion. Her voice dropped softly to lower tones. 'Might we be pardoned, do you think, if we ventured to peep into Mr. Keller's room?'

She spoke of 'Mr. Keller's room' as if it

had been a shrine, approachable only by a few favoured worshippers. 'Where is it?' she inquired, with breathless interest. I led the way out into the passage, and threw open the door without ceremony. Madame Fontaine looked at me as if I had committed an act of sacrilege.

Mr. Engelman, following us with one of his candles, lit an ancient brass lamp which hung from the middle of the ceiling. 'My learned partner,' he explained, 'does a great deal of his reading in his bedroom, and he likes plenty of light. You will have a good view when the lamp has burnt up. The big chimney-piece is considered the finest thing of that sort in Frankfort.'

The widow confronted the chimney-piece, and clasped her hands in silent rap-

ture. When she was able to speak, she put her arm round Minna's waist.

'Let me teach you, my love, to admire this glorious work,' she said, and delivered quite a little lecture on the merits of the chimney-piece. 'Oh, if I could but take the merest sketch of it!' she exclaimed, by way of conclusion. 'But no, it is too much to ask.' She examined everything in the room with the minutest attention. Even the plain little table by the bed-side, with a jug and a glass on it, did not escape her observation. 'Is that his drink?' she asked, with an air of respectful curiosity. 'Do you think I might taste it?'

Mr. Engelman laughed. 'It's only barley-water, dear lady,' he said. 'Our rheumatic old housekeeper makes as few journeys

as possible up and down stairs. When she sets the room in order in the evening, she takes the night-drink up with her, and so saves a second journey.'

'Taste it, Minna,' said the widow, handingt the glass to her daughter. 'How refreshing! how pure!'

Mr. Engelman, standing on the other side of her, whispered in her ear. I was just behind them, and could not help hearing him. 'You will make me jealous,' he said; 'you never noticed *my* night-drink—*I* have beer.'

The widow answered him by a look; he heaved a little sigh of happiness. Poor Mr. Engelman!

Minna innocently broke in on this mute scene of sentiment.

She was looking at the pictures in the room, and asked for explanations of them which Mr. Engelman only could afford. It struck me as odd that her mother's artistic sympathies did not appear to be excited by the pictures. Instead of joining her daughter at the other end of the room, she stood by the bedside with her hand resting on the little table, and her eyes fixed on the jug of barley-water, absorbed in thought. On a sudden, she started, turned quickly, and caught me observing her. I might have been deceived by the lamp-light; but I thought I saw a flash of expression under her heavy eyelids, charged with such intensity of angry suspicion that it startled me. She was herself again, before I could decide

whether to trust my own strong impression or not.

'Do I surprise you, David?' she asked in her gentlest tones. 'I ought to be looking at the pictures, you think? My friend! I can't always control my own sad recollections. They will force themselves on me—sometimes when the most trifling associations call them up. Dear Mr. Engelman understands me. He, no doubt, has suffered too. May I sit down for a moment?'

She dropped languidly into a chair, and sat looking at the famous chimney-piece. Her attitude was the perfection of grace. Mr. Engelman hurried through his explanation of the pictures, and placed himself at her side, and admired the chimney-piece with her.

'Artists think it looks best by lamplight,' he said. 'The big pediment between the windows keeps out the light in the daytime.'

Madame Fontaine looked round at him with a softly approving smile. 'Exactly what I was thinking myself, when you spoke,' she said. 'The effect by this light is simply perfect. Why didn't I bring my sketch-book with me? I might have stolen some little memorial of it, in Mr. Keller's absence.' She turned towards me when she said that.

'If you can do without colours,' I suggested, 'we have paper and pencils in the house.'

The clock in the corridor struck the hour.

Mr. Engelman looked uneasy, and got

up from his chair. His action suggested that the time had passed by us unperceived, and that Mr. Keller's return might take place at any moment. The same impression was evidently produced on Minna. For once in her life, the widow's quick perception seemed to have deserted her. She kept her seat as composedly as if she had been at home.

'I wonder whether I could manage without my colours?' she said placidly. 'Perhaps I might try.'

Mr. Engelman's uneasiness increased to downright alarm. Minna perceived the change, as I did, and at once interfered.

'I am afraid, mamma, it is too late for sketching to-night,' she said. 'Suppose Mr. Keller should come back?'

Madame Fontaine rose instantly, with a look of confusion. 'How very stupid of me not to think of it!' she exclaimed. 'Forgive me, Mr. Engelman—I was so interested, so absorbed—thank you a thousand times for your kindness!' She led the way out, with more apologies and more gratitude. Mr. Engelman recovered his tranquillity. He looked at her lovingly, and gave her his arm to lead her down-stairs.

On this occasion, Minna and I were in front. We reached the first landing, and waited there. The widow was wonderfully slow in descending the stairs. Judging by what we heard, she was absorbed in the old balusters now. When she at last joined us on the landing, the doors of the rooms on the first floor delayed her again: it was

simply impossible, she said, to pass them without notice. Once more, Minna and I waited on the ground floor. Here, there was another ancient brass lamp which lighted the hall; and, therefore, another object of beauty which it was impossible to pass over in a hurry.

'I never knew mamma behave so oddly before,' said Minna. 'If such a thing wasn't impossible, in our situation, one would really think she wanted Mr. Keller to catch us in the house!'

There was not the least doubt in my mind (knowing as I did, how deeply Madame Fontaine was interested in forcing her acquaintance on Mr. Keller) that this was exactly what she did want. Fortune is proverbially said to favour the bold; and

Fortune offered to the widow the perilous opportunity of which she had been in search.

While she was still admiring the lamp, the grating sound became audible of a key put into the street door.

The door opened, and Mr. Keller walked into the hall.

He stopped instantly at the sight of two ladies who were both strangers to him, and looked interrogatively at his partner. Mr. Engelman had no choice but to risk an explanation of some kind. He explained, without mentioning names.

'Friends of mine, Keller,' he said confusedly, 'to whom I have been showing the house.'

Mr. Keller took off his hat, and bowed

to the widow. With a boldness that amazed me, under the circumstances, she made a low curtsey to him, smiled her sweetest smile, and deliberately mentioned her name.

'I am Madame Fontaine, sir,' she said. 'And this is my daughter, Minna.'

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. KELLER fixed his eyes on the widow in stern silence; walked past her to the inner end of the hall; and entered a room at the back of the house, closing the door behind him. Even if he had felt inclined to look at Minna, it would not have been possible for him to see her. After one timid glance at him, the poor girl hid herself behind me, trembling piteously. I took her hand to encourage her. 'Oh, what hope is there for us,' she whispered, 'with such a man as that?'

Madame Fontaine turned as Mr. Keller

passed her, and watched his progress along the hall until he disappeared from view. 'No,' she said quietly to herself, 'you don't escape me in that way.'

As if moved by a sudden impulse, she set forth on the way by which Mr. Keller had gone before her; walking, as he had walked, to the door at the end of the hall.

I had remained with Minna, and was not in a position to see how her mother looked. Mr. Engelman's face, as he stretched out his hands entreatingly to stop Madame Fontaine, told me that the fierce passions hidden deep in the woman's nature had risen to the surface and shown themselves. 'Oh, dear lady! dear lady!' cried the simple old man, 'Don't look like that! It's only Keller's temper—he will soon be himself again.'

Without answering him, without looking at him, she lifted her hand, and put him back from her as if he had been a troublesome child. With her firm graceful step, she resumed her progress along the hall to the room at the end, and knocked sharply at the door.

Mr. Keller's voice answered from within, 'Who is there?'

'Madame Fontaine,' said the widow. 'I wish to speak to you.'

'I decline to receive Madame Fontaine.'

'In that case, Mr. Keller, I will do myself the honour of writing to you.'

'I refuse to read your letter.'

'Take the night to think of it, Mr. Keller, and change your mind in the morning.'

She turned away, without waiting for a

reply, and joined us at the outer end of the hall.

Minna advanced to meet her, and kissed her tenderly. 'Dear, kind mamma, you are doing this for my sake,' said the grateful girl. 'I am ashamed that you should humble yourself—it is so useless!'

'It shall *not* be useless,' her mother answered. 'If fifty Mr. Kellers threatened your happiness, my child, I would brush the fifty out of your way. Oh, my darling, my darling!'

Her voice—as firm as the voice of a man, while she declared her resolution—faltered and failed her when the last words of endearment fell from her lips. She drew Minna to her bosom, and embraced in silent rapture the one creature whom she loved. When

she raised her head again she was, to my mind, more beautiful than I had ever yet seen her. The all-ennobling tears of love and grief filled her eyes. Knowing the terrible story that is still to be told, let me do that miserable woman justice. Hers was not a wholly corrupted heart. It was always in Minna's power to lift her above her own wickedness. When she held out the hand that had just touched her daughter to Mr. Engelman, it trembled as if she had been the most timid woman living.

'Good night, dear friend,' she said to him; 'I am sorry to have been the innocent cause of this little embarrassment.'

Simple Mr. Engelman put his handkerchief to his eyes; never, in all his life, had he been so puzzled, so frightened, and so

distressed. He kissed the widow's hand. 'Do let me see you safe home!' he said, in tones of the tenderest entreaty.

'Not to night,' she answered. He attempted a faint remonstrance. Madame Fontaine knew perfectly well how to assert her authority over him—she gave him another of those tender looks which had already become the charm of his life. Mr. Engelman sat down on one of the hall chairs completely overwhelmed. 'Dear and admirable woman!' I heard him say to himself softly.

Taking leave of me in my turn, the widow dropped my hand, struck, to all appearance, by a new idea.

'I have a favour to ask of you, David,' she said. 'Do you mind going back with us?'

As a matter of course I took my hat, and placed myself at her service. Mr. Engelman got on his feet, and lifted his plump hands in mute and melancholy protest. 'Don't be uneasy,' Madame Fontaine said to him, with a faint smile of contempt. 'David doesn't love me!'

I paused for a moment, as I followed her out, to console Mr. Engelman. 'She is old enough to be my mother, sir,' I whispered; 'and this time, at any rate, she has told you the truth.'

Hardly a word passed between us on our way through the streets and over the bridge. Minna was sad and silent, thinking of Fritz; and whatever her mother might have to say to me, was evidently to be said in private. Arrived at the lodgings, Madame Fontaine

requested me to wait for her in the shabby little sitting-room, and graciously gave me permission to smoke. 'Say good night to David,' she continued, turning to her daughter. 'Your poor little heart is heavy to-night, and mamma means to put you to bed as if you were a child again. Ah! me, if those days could only come back!'

After a short absence the widow returned to me, with a composed manner and a quiet smile. The meeting with Mr. Keller seemed to have been completely dismissed from her thoughts, in the brief interval since I had seen her last.

'We often hear of parents improving their children,' she said. 'It is my belief that the children quite as often improve the parents. I have had some happy minutes

with Minna—and (would you believe it?) I am already disposed to forgive Mr. Keller's brutality, and to write to him in a tone of moderation, which must surely have its effect. All Minna's doing—and my sweet girl doesn't in the least suspect it herself! If you ever have children of your own, David, you will understand me and feel for me. In the meantime, I must not detain you by idle talk—I must say plainly what I want of you.' She opened her writing-desk and took up a pen. 'If I write to Mr. Keller under your own eye, do you object to take charge of my letter?'

I hesitated how to answer. To say the least of it, her request embarrassed me.

'I don't expect you to give it to Mr. Keller personally,' she explained. 'It is of

very serious importance to me' (she laid a marked emphasis on those words) 'to be quite sure that my letter has reached him, and that he has really had the opportunity of reading it. If you will only place it on his desk in the office, with your own hand, that is all I ask you to do. For Minna's sake, mind; not for mine!'

For Minna's sake, I consented. She rose directly, and signed to me to take her place at the desk.

'It will save time,' she said, 'if you write the rough draft of the letter from my dictation. I am accustomed to dictate my letters, with Minna for secretary. Of course, you shall see the fair copy before I seal it.'

She began to walk up and down the little room, with her hands crossed behind her in

the attitude made famous by the great Napoleon. After a minute of consideration, she dictated the draft as follows:

'Sir,—I am well aware that scandalous reports at Würzburg have prejudiced you against me. Those reports, so far as I know, may be summed up under three heads.

'(First.) That my husband died in debt through my extravagance.

'(Second.) That my respectable neighbours refuse to associate with me.

'(Third.) That I entrapped your son Fritz into asking for my daughter's hand in marriage, because I knew his father to be a rich man.

'To the first calumny I reply, that the debts are due to expensive chemical experiments in which my late husband engaged,

and that I have satisfied the creditors to the last farthing. Grant me an audience, and I will refer you to the creditors themselves.

'To the second calumny I reply, that I received invitations, on my arrival in Würzburg after my marriage, from every lady of distinguished social position in the town. After experience of the society thus offered to me, I own to having courteously declined subsequent invitations, and having devoted myself in retirement to my husband, to my infant child, and to such studies in literature and art as I had time to pursue. Gossip and scandal, with an eternal accompaniment of knitting, are not to my taste; and, while I strictly attend to domestic duties, I do not consider them as constituting, in connection

with tea-drinking, the one great interest of a woman's life. I plead guilty to having been foolish enough to openly acknowledge these sentiments, and to having made bitter enemies everywhere as the necessary consequence. If this plain defence of myself fails to satisfy you, grant me an audience, and I will answer your questions, whatever they may be.

'To the third calumny, I reply, that if you had been a Prince instead of a merchant, I would still have done everything in my power to keep your son away from my daughter—for this simple reason, that the idea of parting with her to any man fills me with grief and dismay. I only yielded to the marriage engagement, when the conviction was forced upon me that my poor

child's happiness depended on her union with your son. It is this consideration alone which induces me to write to you, and to humiliate myself by pleading for a hearing. As for the question of money, if through some unexpected misfortune you became a bankrupt to-morrow, I would entreat you to consent to the marriage exactly as I entreat you now. Poverty has no terrors for me while I have health to work. But I cannot face the idea of my child's life being blighted, because you choose to believe the slanders that are spoken of her mother. For the third time I ask you to grant me an audience, and to hear me in my own defence.'

There she paused, and looked over my shoulder.

'I think that is enough,' she said. 'Do you see anything objectionable in my letter?'

How could I object to the letter? From beginning to end, it was strongly, and yet moderately, expressed. I resigned my place at the desk, and the widow wrote the fair copy, with her own hand. She made no change whatever, except by adding these ominous lines as a postscript:

'I implore you not to drive me to despair. A mother who is pleading for her child's life—it is nothing less, in this case—is a woman who surely asserts a sacred claim. Let no wise man deny it.'

'Do you think it quite discreet,' I ventured to ask, 'to add those words?'

She looked at me with a moment's furtive scrutiny, and only answered after she

had sealed the letter, and placed it in my hands.

'I have my reasons,' she replied. 'Let the words remain.'

Returning to the house at rather a late hour for Frankfort, I was surprised to find Mr. Keller waiting to see me.

'I have had a talk with my partner,' he said. 'It has left (for the time only, I hope), a painful impression on both sides—and I must ask you to do me a service, in the place of Mr. Engelman—who has an engagement to-morrow, which prevents him from leaving Frankfort.'

His tone indicated plainly enough that the '[illegible]ent' was with Madame Fon[illegible]ine. [illegible]ords must have passed be[illegible]ld friends on the subject of

the widow. Even Mr. Engelman's placid temper had, no doubt, resented Mr. Keller's conduct at the meeting in the hall.

'The service I ask of you,' he resumed, 'will be easily rendered. The proprietor of a commercial establishment at Hanau is desirous of entering into business-relations with us, and has sent references to respectable persons in the town and neighbourhood, which it is necessary to verify. We are so busy in the office that it is impossible for me to leave Frankfort myself, or to employ our clerks on this errand. I have drawn out the necessary instructions—and Hanau, as you are aware, is within an easy distance of Frankfort. Have you any objection to be the representative of the house in this matter?'

It is needless to say that I was gratified by the confidence that had been placed in me, and eager to show that I really deserved it. We arranged that I should leave Frankfort by the earliest conveyance the next morning.

On our way upstairs to our bed-chambers, Mr. Keller detained me for a moment more.

'I have no claim to control you in the choice of your friends,' he said; 'but I am old enough to give you a word of advice. Don't associate yourself too readily, David, with the woman whom I found here to-night.'

He shook hands cordially, and left me. I thought of Madame Fontaine's letter in my

pocket, and felt a strong conviction that he would persist in his refusal to read it.

The servants were the only persons stirring in the house, when I rose the next morning. Unobserved by anyone, I placed the letter on the desk in Mr. Keller's private room. That done, I started on my journey to Hanau.

CHAPTER XIV.

THANKS to the instructions confided to me, my errand presented no difficulties. There were certain persons to whom I was introduced, and certain information to be derived from them, which it was my duty to submit to Mr. Keller on my return. Fidelity was required of me, and discretion was required of me—and that was all.

At the close of my day's work, the hospitable merchant, whose references I had been engaged in verifying, refused to permit me to return to the hotel. His dinner-hour had been put off expressly to suit my con-

venience. 'You will only meet the members of my family,' he said, 'and a cousin of my wife's who is here with her daughter, on a visit to us—Frau Meyer, of Würzburg.'

I accepted the invitation, feeling privately an Englishman's reluctance to confronting an assembly of strangers, and anticipating nothing remarkable in reference to Frau Meyer, although she did come from Würzburg. Even when I was presented to the ladies in due form, as 'the honoured representative of Mr. Keller, of Frankfort,' I was too stupid, or too much absorbed in the business on which I had been engaged, to be much struck by the sudden interest with which Frau Meyer regarded me. She was a fat florid old lady, who looked coarsely clever

and resolute; and she had a daughter who promised to resemble her but too faithfully, in due course of time. It was a relief to me, at dinner, to find myself placed between the merchant's wife and her eldest son. They were far more attractive neighbours at table, to my thinking, than Frau Meyer.

Dinner being over, we withdrew to another room to take our coffee. The merchant and his son, both ardent musicians in their leisure hours, played a sonata for pianoforte and violin. I was at the opposite extremity of the room, looking at some fine proof impressions of prints from the old masters, when a voice at my side startled me by an unexpected question.

'May I ask, sir, if you are acquainted with Mr. Keller's son?'

I looked round, and discovered Frau Meyer.

'Have you seen him lately?' she proceeded, when I had acknowledged that I was acquainted with Fritz. 'And can you tell me where he is now?'

I answered both these questions. Frau Meyer looked thoroughly well satisfied with me. 'Let us have a little talk,' she said, and seated herself, and signed to me to take a chair near her.

'I feel a true interest in Fritz,' she resumed, lowering her voice so as not to be heard by the musicians at the other end of the room. 'Until to-day, I have heard nothing of him since he left Würzburg. I like to talk about him—he once did me a kindness a long time since. I suppose you are in his

confidence? Has he told you why his father sent him away from the University?'

My reply to this was, I am afraid, rather absently given. The truth is, my mind was running on some earlier words which had dropped from the old lady's lips. 'He once did me a kindness a long time since.' When had I last heard that commonplace phrase? and why did I remember it so readily when I now heard it again?

'Ah, his father did a wise thing in separating him from that woman and her daughter!' Frau Meyer went on. 'Madame Fontaine deliberately entrapped the poor boy into the engagement. But perhaps you are a friend of hers? In that case, I retract and apologise.'

'Quite needless,' I said.

'You are *not* a friend of Madame Fontaine?' she persisted.

This cool attempt to force an answer from me failed in its object. It was like being cross-examined in a court of law; and, in our common English phrase, 'it set my back up.' In the strict sense of the word, Madame Fontaine might be termed an acquaintance, but certainly not a friend, of mine. For once, I took the prudent course, and said, No.

Frau Meyer's expansive bosom emitted a hearty sigh of relief. 'Ah!' she said, 'now I can talk freely—in Fritz's interest, mind. You are a young man like himself; he will be disposed to listen to you. Do all you can to back his father's influence, and cure

him of his infatuation. I tell you plainly, his marriage would be his ruin!'

'You speak very strongly, madam. Do you object to the young lady?'

'Not I; a harmless insignificant creature —nothing more and nothing less. It's her vile mother that I object to.'

'As I have heard, Frau Meyer, there are two sides to that question. Fritz is persuaded that Madame Fontaine is an injured woman. He assures me, for instance, that she is the fondest of mothers.'

'Bah! What does *that* amount to? It's as much a part of a woman's nature to take to her child when she has got one, as it is to take to her dinner when she is hungry. A fond mother? What stuff! Why, a cat is a fond mother!—What's the matter?'

A cat is a fond mother. Another familiar phrase—and this time a phrase remarkable enough to lead my memory back in the right direction. In an instant I recollected the anonymous letter to Fritz. In an instant I felt the conviction that Frau Meyer, in her eagerness to persuade me, had unconsciously repeated two of the phrases which she had already used, in her eagerness to persuade Fritz. No wonder I started in my chair, when I felt that I was face to face with the writer of the anonymous letter!

I made some excuse—I forget what—and hastened to resume the conversation. The opportunity of making discoveries which might be invaluable to Fritz (to say nothing of good Mr. Engelman) was not an opportunity to be neglected. I persisted in quoting

Fritz's authority; I repeated his assertion relative to the love of scandal at Würzburg, and the envy of Madame Fontaine's superior attractions felt among the ladies. Frau Meyer laughed disdainfully.

'Poor Fritz!' she said. 'An excellent disposition—but so easily persuaded, so much too amiable. Our being all envious of Widow Fontaine is too ridiculous. It is a mere waste of time to notice such nonsense. Wait a little, Mr. David, and you will see. If you and Mr. Keller can only keep Fritz out of the widow's way for a few months longer, his eyes will be opened in spite of himself. He may yet come back to us with a free heart, and he may choose his future wife more wisely next time.'

As she said this her eyes wandered away

to her daughter, at the other end of the room. Unless her face betrayed her, she had evidently planned, at some past time, to possess herself of Fritz as a son-in-law, and she had not resigned the hope of securing him yet. Madame Fontaine might be a deceitful and dangerous woman. But what sort of witness against her was this abusive old lady, the unscrupulous writer of an anonymous letter? 'You prophesy very confidently about what is to come in the future,' I ventured to say.

Frau Meyer's red face turned a shade redder. 'Does that mean that you don't believe me?' she asked.

'Certainly not, madam. It only means that you speak severely of Doctor Fontaine's

widow—without mentioning any facts that justify you.'

'Oh! you want facts, do you? I'll soon show you whether I know what I am talking about or not. Has Fritz mentioned that among Madame Fontaine's other virtues, she has paid her debts? I'll tell you how she has paid them—as an example, young gentleman, that I am not talking at random. Your admirable widow, sir, is great at fascinating old men; they are always falling in love with her, the idiots! A certain old man at Würzburg—close on eighty, mind—was one of her victims. I had a letter this morning which tells me that he was found dead in his bed, two days since, and that his nephew is the sole heir to all that he leaves behind him. Examina-

tion of his papers has shown that *he* paid the widow's creditors, and that he took a promissory note from her—ha! ha! ha!—a promissory note from a woman without a farthing!—in payment of the sum that he had advanced. The poor old man would, no doubt, have destroyed the note if he had known that his end was so near. His sudden death has transferred it to the hands of his heir. In money-matters, the nephew is reported to be one of the hardest men living. When that note falls due, he will present it for payment. I don't know where Madame Fontaine is now. No matter! Sooner or later, she is sure to hear of what has happened—and she must find the money, or see the inside of a debtor's prison. Those are the facts that I had in my mind,

Mr. David, when I spoke of events opening Fritz's eyes to the truth.'

I submitted with all possible humility to the lady's triumph over me. My thoughts were with Minna. What a prospect for the innocent, affectionate girl! Assuming the statement that I had just heard to be true, there was surely a chance that Madame Fontaine (with time before her) might find the money. I put this view of the case to Frau Meyer.

'If I didn't know Mr. Keller to be a thoroughly resolute man,' she answered, 'I should say she might find the money too. She has only to succeed in marrying her daughter to Fritz, and Mr. Keller would be obliged to pay the money for the sake of the family credit. But he is one of the few

men whom she can't twist round her finger. If you ever fall in with her, take care of yourself. She may find your influence with Fritz an obstacle in her way—and she may give you reason to remember that the mystery of her husband's lost chest of poisons is not cleared up yet. It was all in the German newspapers—you know what I mean.'

This seemed to me to be passing all bounds of moderation. 'And *you* know, madam,' I answered sharply, 'that there was no evidence against her—nothing whatever to associate her with the robbery of the medicine chest.'

'Not even suspicion, Mr. David?'

'Not even suspicion.'

I rose from my chair as I spoke. Minna

was still in my thoughts; I was not merely unwilling, I was almost afraid to hear more.

'One minute,' said Frau Meyer. 'Which of the two hotels here are you staying at? I want to send you something to read to-night, after you have left us.'

I told her the name of the hotel; and we joined our friends at the other end of the room. Not long afterwards I took my leave. My spirits were depressed; a dark cloud of uncertainty seemed to hang over the future. Even the prospect of returning to Frankfort, the next day, became repellent to me. I was almost inclined to hope that my aunt might (as Mr. Keller had predicted) recall me to London.

CHAPTER XV.

FROM these reflections I was roused by the appearance of a waiter, with a letter for me. The envelope contained a slip cut from a German newspaper, and these lines of writing, signed by Frau Meyer :—

'You are either a very just, or a very obstinate young man. In either case, it will do you no harm to read what I inclose. I am not such a scandal-mongering old woman as you seem to think. The concealment of the names will not puzzle you. Please return the slip. It belongs to our

excellent host, and forms part of his collection of literary curiosities.'

Such was the introduction to my reading. I translate it from the German newspaper into English as literally as I can.

The Editor's few prefatory words were at the top of the column, bearing the date of September 1828.

'We have received, in strictest confidence, extracts from letters written by a lady to a once-beloved female friend. The extracts are dated and numbered, and are literally presented in this column—excepting the obviously necessary precaution of suppressing names, places, and days of the month. Taken in connection with a certain inquiry which is just now occupying the public mind, these fragments may throw

some faint glimmer of light on events which are at present involved in darkness.'

Number I. 1809 :—'Yes, dearest Julie, I have run the grand risk. Only yesterday, I was married to Doctor ——. The people at the church were our only witnesses.

'My father declares that I have degraded his noble blood by marrying a medical man. He forbade my mother to attend the ceremony. Poor simple soul! she asked me if I loved my young doctor, and was quite satisfied when I said Yes. As for my father's objections, my husband is a man of high promise in his profession. In his country—I think I told you in my last letter that he was a Frenchman—a famous physician is ennobled by the State. I shall leave no stone unturned, my dear, to push my husband

forward. And when he is made a Baron, we shall see what my father will say to us then.'

Number II. 1810.—'We have removed, my Julie, to this detestably dull old German town, for no earthly reason but that the University is famous as a medical school.

'My husband informs me, in his sweetest manner, that he will hesitate at no sacrifice of our ordinary comforts to increase his professional knowledge. If you could see how the ladies dress in this lost hole of a place, if you could hear the twaddle they talk, you would pity me. I have but one consolation—a lovely baby, Julie, a girl: I had almost said an angel. Were you as fond of your first child, I wonder, as I am of

mine? And did you utterly forget your husband, when the little darling was first put into your arms? Write and tell me.'

Number III. 1811.—'I have hardly patience to take up my pen. But I shall do something desperate, if I don't relieve my overburdened mind in some way.

'After I wrote to you last year, I succeeded in getting my husband away from the detestable University. But he persisted in hanging about Germany, and conferring with mouldy old doctors (whom he calls "Princes of Science"!) instead of returning to Paris, taking a handsome house, and making his way to the top of the tree with my help. I am the very woman to

give brilliant parties, and to push my husband's interests with powerful people of all degrees. No; I really must not dwell on it. When I think of what has happened since, it will drive me mad.

'Six weeks ago, a sort of medical congress was announced to be held at the University. Something in the proposed discussion was to be made the subject of a prize-essay. The doctor's professional interest in this matter decided him on trying for the prize—and the result is our return to the hateful old town and its society.

'Of course, my husband resumes his professional studies; of course, I am thrown once more among the dowdy gossiping women. But that is far from being the worst of it. Among the people in the School

of Chemistry here, there is a new man, who entered the University shortly after we left it last year. This devil—it is the only right word for him—has bewitched my weak husband; and, for all I can see to the contrary, has ruined our prospects in life.

'He is a Hungarian. Small, dirty, lean as a skeleton, with hands like claws, eyes like a wild beast's, and the most hideously false smile you ever saw in a human face. What his history is, nobody knows. The people at the medical school call him the most extraordinary experimental chemist living. His ideas astonish the Professors themselves. The students have named him "The new Paracelsus."

'I ventured to ask him, one day, if he believed he could make gold. He looked

at me with his frightful grin, and said, "Yes, and diamonds too, with time and money to help me." He not only believes in The Philosopher's Stone; he says he is on the trace of some explosive compound so terrifically destructive in its effect, that it will make war impossible. He declares that he will annihilate time and space by means of electricity; and that he will develop steam as a motive power, until travellers can rush over the whole habitable globe at the rate of a mile in a minute.

'Why do I trouble you with these ravings? My dear, this boastful adventurer has made himself master of my husband, has talked him out of his senses, has reduced my influence over him to nothing. Do you think I am exaggerating? Hear how it has

ended. My husband absolutely refuses to leave this place. He cares no longer even to try for the prize. The idea of medical practice has become distasteful to him, and he has decided on devoting his life to discovery in chemical science.

'And this is the man whom I married with the sincerest belief in the brilliant social career that was before him! For this contemptible creature I have sacrificed my position in the world, and alienated my father from me for ever. I may look forward to being the wife of a poor Professor, who shows experiments to stupid lads in a school. And the friends in Paris, who, to my certain knowledge, are now waiting to give him introductions to the Imperial Court

itself, may transfer their services to some other man.

'No words can tell you what I feel at this complete collapse of all my hopes and plans. The one consideration of my child is all that restrains me from leaving my husband, never to see him again. As it is, I must live a life of deceit, and feign respect and regard for a man whom I despise with my whole heart.

'Power—oh, if I had the power to make the fury that consumes me felt! The curse of our sex is its helplessness. Every day, Julie, the conviction grows on me that I shall end badly. Who among us knows the capacity for wickedness that lies dormant in our natures, until the fatal event comes and calls it forth?

No! I am letting you see too much of my tortured soul. Let me close my letter, and play with my child.'

Number IV. 1812.—'My heartfelt congratulations, dearest, on your return to Germany, after your pleasant visit to the United States. And more congratulations yet on the large addition to your income, due to your husband's intelligence and spirit of enterprise on American ground. Ah, you have married a Man! Happy woman! I am married to a Machine.

'Why have I left your kind letters from America without reply? My Julie, I have constantly thought of you; but the life I lead is slowly crushing my energies. Over

and over again, I have taken up my pen; and over and over again, I have laid it aside, recoiling from the thought of myself and my existence; too miserable (perhaps too proud) to tell you what a wretched creature I am, and what thoughts come to me sometimes in the wakeful hours of the night.

'After this confession, you wonder, perhaps, why I write to you now.

'I really believe it is because I have been threatened with legal proceedings by my creditors, and have just come victoriously out of a hard struggle to appease them for the time. This little fight has roused me from my apathy; it has rallied my spirits, and made me feel like my old self again. I am no longer content with silently loving my

dearest friend; I open my heart and write to her.

'"Oh, dear, how sad that she should be in debt!" I can hear you say this, and sigh to yourself—you who have never known what it was to be in want of money since you were born. Shall I tell you what my husband earns at the University? No: I feel the blood rushing into my face at the bare idea of revealing it.

'Let me do the Professor justice. My Animated Mummy has reached the height of his ambition at last—he is Professor of Chemistry, and is perfectly happy for the rest of his life. My dear, he is as lean, and almost as dirty, as the wretch who first perverted him. Do you remember my once writing to you about a mysterious Hun-

garian, whom we found in the University? A few years since, this man died by suicide, as mysteriously as he had lived. They found him in the laboratory, with a strange inscription traced in chalk on the wall by which he lay dead. These were the words: —"After giving it a fair trial, I find that life is not worth living for. I have decided to destroy myself with a poison of my own discovery. My chemical papers and preparations are hereby bequeathed to my friend Doctor ——, and my body is presented as a free gift to the anatomy school. Let a committee of surgeons and analysts examine my remains. I defy them to discover a trace of the drug that has killed me." And they did try, Julie—and discovered nothing. I wonder whether the suicide has

left the receipt for that poison, among his other precious legacies, to his "friend Doctor ——."

'Why do I trouble you with these nauseous details? Because they are in no small degree answerable for my debts. My husband devotes all his leisure hours to continuing the detestable experiments begun by the Hungarian; and my yearly dress-money for myself and my child has been reduced one half, to pay the chemical expenses.

'Ought I, in this hard case, to have diminished my expenditure to the level of my reduced income?

'If you say Yes, I answer that human endurance has its limits. I can support the martyrdom of my life; the loss of my dearest illusions and hopes; the mean enmity of

our neighbours; the foul-mouthed jealousy of the women; and, more than all, the exasperating patience of a husband who never resents the hardest things I can say to him, and who persists in loving and admiring me as if we were only married last week. But I cannot see my child in a stuff frock, on promenade days in the Palace Gardens, when other people's children are wearing silk. And plain as my own dress may be, I must and will have the best material that is made. When the wife of the military commandant (a woman sprung from the people) goes out in an Indian shawl with Brussels lace in her bonnet, am I to meet her and return her bow, in a camelet cloak and a beaver hat? No! When I lose my self-respect let me lose my life too. My

husband may sink as low as he pleases. I always have stood above him, and I always will!

'And so I am in debt, and my creditors threaten me. What does it matter? I have pacified them, for the time, with some small instalments of money, and a large expenditure of smiles.

'I wish you could see my darling little Minna; she is the loveliest and sweetest child in the world—my pride at all times, and my salvation in my desperate moods. There are moments when I feel inclined to set fire to the hateful University, and destroy all the mouldy old creatures who inhabit it. I take Minna out and buy her a little present, and see her eyes sparkle and her colour rise, and feel her innocent kisses, and become,

for awhile, quite a good woman again. Yesterday, her father—no, I shall work myself up into a fury if I tell you about it. Let me only say that Minna saved me as usual. I took her to the jeweller's and bought her a pair of pearl earrings. If you could have heard her, if you could have seen her, when the little angel first looked at herself in the glass! I wonder when I shall pay for the earrings?

'Ah, Julie, if I only had such an income as yours, I would make my power felt in this place. The insolent women should fawn on me and fear me. I would have my own house and establishment in the country, to purify me after the atmosphere of the Professor's drugs. I would—well! well! never mind what else I would have.

'Talking of power, have you read the account of the execution last year of that wonderful criminal, Anna Maria Zwanziger? Wherever she went, the path of this terrific woman is strewed with the dead whom she has poisoned. She appears to have lived to destroy her fellow-creatures, and to have met her doom with the most undaunted courage. What a career! and what an end![1]

'The foolish people in Würzburg are at a loss to find motives for some of the murders she committed, and try to get out of the difficulty by declaring that she must have been a homicidal maniac. That is not

[1] The terrible career of Anna Maria Zwanziger, sentenced to death at Bamberg in the year 1811, will be found related in Lady Duff-Gordon's translation of Feuerbach's 'Criminal Trials.'

my explanation. I can understand the murderess becoming morally intoxicated with the sense of her own tremendous power. A mere human creature—only a woman, Julie! —armed with the means of secretly dealing death around her, wherever she goes—meeting with strangers who displease her, looking at them quietly, and saying to herself, "I doom you to die, before you are a day older"—is there no explanation, here, of some of Zwanziger's poisonings which are incomprehensible to commonplace minds?

'I put this view, in talking of the trial, to the military commandant a few days since. His vulgar wife answered me before he could speak. "Madame Fontaine," said this spitfire, "my husband and I don't feel

your sympathy with poisoners!" Take that as a specimen of the ladies of Würzburg—and let me close this unmercifully long letter. I think you will acknowledge, my dear, that, when I do write, I place a flattering trust in my friend's patient remembrance of me.'

There the newspaper extracts came to an end.

As a picture of a perverted mind, struggling between good and evil, and slowly losing ground under the stealthy influence of temptation, the letters certainly possessed a melancholy interest for any thoughtful reader. But (not being a spiteful woman) I failed to see, in these extracts, the connection which Frau Meyer had attempted to establish between the wickedness of Madame Fontaine

and the disappearance of her husband's medicine chest.

At the same time, I must acknowledge that a vague impression of distrust *was* left on my mind by what I had read. I felt a certain sense of embarrassment at the prospect of renewing my relations with the widow, on my return to Frankfort; and I was also conscious of a decided increase of anxiety to hear what had been Mr. Keller's reception of Madame Fontaine's letter. Add to this, that my brotherly interest in Minna was sensibly strengthened—and the effect on me of the extracts in the newspaper is truly stated, so far as I can remember it at this distant time.

On the evening of the next day, I was back again at Frankfort.

dearest friend; I open my heart and write to her.

'"Oh, dear, how sad that she should be in debt!" I can hear you say this, and sigh to yourself—you who have never known what it was to be in want of money since you were born. Shall I tell you what my husband earns at the University? No: I feel the blood rushing into my face at the bare idea of revealing it.

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'His hasty temper I never complained of, as you know. But in these later days he is hard—hard as stone. Do you know what he did with dear Madame Fontaine's letter? A downright insult, David—he sent it back to her!'

'Without explanation or apology?' I asked.

'With a line on the envelope. "I warned you that I should refuse to read your letter. You see that I am a man of my word." What a message to send to a poor mother, who only asks leave to plead for her child's happiness! You saw the letter. Enough to melt the heart of any man, as *I* should have thought. I spoke to Keller on the subject; I really couldn't help it.'

'Wasn't that rather indiscreet, Mr. Engelman?'

'I said nothing that could reasonably offend him. "Do you know of some discreditable action on the part of Madame Fontaine, which has not been found out by anyone else?" I asked. "I know the character she bears in Würzburg," he said; "and the other night I saw her face. That is all I know, friend Engelman, and that is enough for me." With those sour words, he walked out of the room. What lamentable prejudice! What an unchristian way of thinking! The name of Madame Fontaine will never be mentioned between us again. When that much-injured lady honours me with another visit, I can only receive her where she will be

protected from insult, in a house of my own.'

'Surely you are not going to separate yourself from Mr. Keller?' I said.

'Not for the present. I will wait till your aunt comes here, and brings that restless reforming spirit of hers into the business. Changes are sure to follow—and my change of residence may pass as one of them.'

He got up to leave the room, and stopped at the door.

'I wish you would come with me, David, to Madame Fontaine's. She is very anxious to see you.' Feeling no such anxiety on my side, I attempted to excuse myself; but he went on without giving me time to speak—'Nice little Miss Minna is very dull, poor child. She has no friend of

her own age here at Frankfort, excepting yourself. And she has asked me more than once when Mr. David would return from Hanau.'

My excuses failed me when I heard this. Mr. Engelman and I left the house together.

As we approached the door of Madame Fontaine's lodgings, it was opened from within by the landlady, and a stranger stepped out into the street. He was sufficiently well dressed to pass for a gentleman —but there were obstacles in his face and manner to a successful personation of the character. He cast a peculiarly furtive look at us both, as we ascended the house-steps. I thought he was a police spy. Mr. Engelman set him down a degree lower in the social scale.

'I hope you are not in debt, ma'am,' he said to the landlady; 'that man looks to me like a bailiff in disguise.'

'I manage to pay my way, sir, though it is a hard struggle,' the woman replied. 'As for the gentleman who has just gone out, I know no more of him than you do.'

'May I ask what he wanted here?'

'He wanted to know when Madame Fontaine was likely to quit my apartments. I told him my lodger had not appointed any time for leaving me yet.'

'Did he mention Madame Fontaine's name?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How did he know that she lived here?'

'He didn't say.'

'And you didn't think of asking him?'

'It was very stupid of me, sir—I only asked him how he came to know that I let apartments. He said, "Never mind, now; I am well recommended, and I'll call again, and tell you about it." And then I opened the door for him, as you saw.'

'Did he ask to see Madame Fontaine?'

'No, sir.'

'Very odd!' said Mr. Engelman, as we went upstairs. 'Do you think we ought to mention it?'

I thought not. There was nothing at all uncommon in the stranger's inquiries, taken by themselves. We had no right, that I could see, to alarm the widow, because we happened to attach purely fanciful suspicions to a man of whom we knew nothing.

I expressed this opinion to Mr. Engelman; and he agreed with me.

The same subdued tone which had struck me in the little household in Main Street, was again visible in the welcome which I received in Madame Fontaine's lodgings. Minna looked weary of waiting for the long-expected letter from Fritz. Minna's mother pressed my hand in silence, with a melancholy smile. Her reception of my companion struck me as showing some constraint. After what had happened on the night of her visit to the house, she could no longer expect him to help her to an interview with Mr. Keller. Was she merely keeping up appearances, on the chance that he might yet be useful to her, in some other way? The trifling change which I observed did

not appear to present itself to Mr. Engelman. I turned away to Minna. Knowing what I knew, it grieved me to see that the poor old man was fonder of the widow, and prouder of her than ever.

It was no very hard task to revive the natural hopefulness of Minna's nature. Calculating the question of time in the days before railroads, I was able to predict the arrival of Fritz's letter in two, or at most three days more. This bright prospect was instantly reflected in the girl's innocent face. Her interest in the little world about her revived. When her mother joined us, in our corner of the room, I was telling her all that could be safely related of my visit to Hanau. Madame Fontaine seemed to be quite as attentive as her daughter to the

progress of my trivial narrative—to Mr. Engelman's evident surprise.

'Did you go farther than Hanau?' the widow asked.

'No farther.'

'Were there any guests to meet you at the dinner-party?'

'Only the members of the family.'

'I lived so long, David, in dull old Würzburg, that I can't help feeling a certain interest in the town. Did the subject turn up? Did you hear of anything that was going on there?'

I answered this as cautiously as I had answered the questions that had gone before it. Frau Meyer had, I fear, partially succeeding in perverting my sense of justice. Before my journey to Hanau, I might have

attributed the widow's inquiries to mere curiosity. I believed suspicion to be the ruling motive with her, now.

Before any more questions could be asked, Mr. Engelman changed the topic to a subject of greater interest to himself. 'I have told David, dear lady, of Mr. Keller's inhuman reception of your letter.'

'Don't say "inhuman,"' Madame Fontaine answered gently; 'it is I alone who am to blame. I have been a cause of estrangement between you and your partner, and I have destroyed whatever little chance I might once have had of setting myself right in Mr. Keller's estimation. All due to my rashness in mentioning my name. If I had been less fond of my little girl here, and less eager to seize the first opportunity of plead-

ing for her, I should never have committed that fatal mistake.'

So far, this was sensibly said—and, as an explanation of her own imprudence, was unquestionably no more than the truth.

I was less favourably impressed by what followed, when she went on ;

'Pray understand, David, that I don't complain. I feel no ill-will towards Mr. Keller. If chance placed the opportunity of doing him a service in my hands, I should be ready and willing to make use of it—I should be only too glad to repair the mischief that I have so innocently done.'

She raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Mr. Engelman raised his handkerchief to *his* eyes. Minna took her mother's hand. I alone sat undemonstrative, with my sym-

pathies in a state of repose. Frau Meyer again! Nothing but the influence of Frau Meyer could have hardened me in this way!'

'I have entreated our sweet friend not to leave Frankfort in despair,' Mr. Engelman explained in faltering tones. 'Although my influence with Keller is, for the present, a lost influence in this matter, I am more than willing—I am eager—to speak to Mrs. Wagner on Madame Fontaine's behalf. My advice is, Wait for Mrs. Wagner's arrival, and trust to *my* zeal, and *my* position in the firm. When both his partners summon him to do justice to an injured woman, even Keller must submit!'

The widow's eyes were still hidden behind her handkerchief. But the lower part of her face was visible. Unless I completely

misinterpreted the mute language of her lips, she had not the faintest belief in the fulfilment of Mr. Engelman's prediction. Whatever reason she might have for remaining in Frankfort, after the definite rejection of her too-confident appeal to Mr. Keller's sympathies, was thus far undoubtedly a reason known only to herself. That very night, after we had left her, an incident occurred which suggested that she had some motive for ingratiating herself with one of the servants in Mr. Keller's house.

Our domestic establishment indoors consisted of the sour-tempered old housekeeper (who was perfectly unapproachable); of a little kitchenmaid (too unimportant a person to be worth conciliating); and of the footman Joseph, who performed the usual duties

of waiting on us at table, and answering the door. This last was a foolish young man, excessively vain of his personal appearance —but a passably good servant, making allowance for these defects.

Having occasion to ring for Joseph, to do me some little service, I noticed that the loose ends of his necktie were connected by a smart new pin, presenting a circle of malachite set in silver.

'Have you had a present lately,' I asked, 'or are you extravagant enough to spend your money on buying jewellery?'

Joseph simpered in undisguised satisfaction with himself. 'It's a present, sir, from Madame Fontaine. I take her flowers almost every day from Mr. Engelman, and I have done one or two trifling errands for her in

the town. She was pleased with my attention to her wishes. "I have very little money, Mr. Joseph," she said; "oblige me by accepting this pin in return for the trouble I have given you." And she took the pin out of the beautiful white lace round her neck, and made me a present of it with her own hand. A most liberal lady, isn't she, sir?'

'Liberal indeed, Joseph, considering the small services which you seem to have rendered to her. Are you quite sure that she doesn't expect something more of you?'

'Oh, quite sure, sir.' He blushed as he said that—and rather hurriedly left the room. How would Frau Meyer have interpreted Joseph's blushes, and the widow's

liberality? I went to bed without caring to pursue that question.

A lapse of two days more brought with it two interesting events: the opening night of a travelling opera company on a visit to Frankfort, and the arrival by a late post of our long-expected letters from London.

The partners (both of them ardent lovers of music) had taken a box for the short season, and, with their usual kindness, had placed a seat at my disposal. We were all three drinking our coffee before going to the theatre, and Joseph was waiting on us, when the rheumatic old housekeeper brought in the letters, and handed them to me, as the person who sat nearest to the door.

'Why, my good creature, what has made

you climb the stairs, when you might have rung for Joseph?' asked kind-hearted Mr. Engelman.

'Because I have got something to ask of my masters,' answered crabbed Mother Barbara. 'There are your letters, to begin with. Is it true that you are, all three of you, going to the theatre to-night?'

She never used any of the ordinary terms of respect. If she had been their mother, instead of their housekeeper, she could not have spoken more familiarly to the two old gentlemen who employed her.

'Well,' she went on, my daughter is in trouble about her baby, and wants my advice. Teething, and convulsions, and that sort of thing. As you are all going out for the evening, you don't want me, after I have

put your bedrooms tidy. I can go to my daughter for an hour or two, I suppose —and Joseph (who isn't of much use, heaven knows) can take care of the house.'

Mr. Keller, refreshing his memory of the opera of the night (Gluck's 'Armida') by consulting the book, nodded, and went on with his reading. Mr. Engelman said, 'Certainly, my good soul; give my best wishes to your daughter for the baby's health.' Mother Barbara grunted, and hobbled out of the room.

I looked at the letters. Two were for me—from my aunt and Fritz. One was for Mr. Keller—addressed also in the handwriting of my aunt. When I handed it to him across the table, he dropped 'Armida' the moment he looked at the envelope.

It was the answer to his remonstrance on the subject of the employment of women.

For Minna's sake, I opened Fritz's letter first. It contained the long-expected lines to his sweetheart. I went out at once, and, inclosing the letter in an envelope, sent Joseph away with it to the widow's lodgings before Mother Barbara's departure made it necessary for him to remain in the house.

Fritz's letter to me was very unsatisfactory. In my absence, London was unendurably dull to him, and Minna was more necessary to the happiness of his life than ever. He desired to be informed, by return of post, of the present place of residence of Madame Fontaine and her daughter. If I refused to comply with this

request, he could not undertake to control himself, and he thought it quite likely that he might 'follow his heart's dearest aspirations,' and set forth on the journey to Frankfort in search of Minna.

My aunt's letter was full of the subject of Jack Straw.

In the first place she had discovered, while arranging her late husband's library, a book which had evidently suggested his ideas of reformation in the treatment of the insane. It was called, 'Description of the Retreat, an institution near York for insane persons of the Society of Friends. Written by Samuel Tuke.' She had communicated with the institution; had received the most invaluable help; and would bring the book with her to Frankfort, to be trans-

lated into German, in the interests of humanity.[1]

As for her merciful experiment with poor Jack, it had proved to be completely successful—with one serious drawback. So long as he was under her eye, and in daily communication with her, a more grateful, affectionate, and perfectly harmless creature never breathed the breath of life. Even Mr. Hartrey and the lawyer had been obliged to confess that they had been in the wrong throughout, in the view they had taken of the matter. But, when she happened to be absent from the house, for any length of time, it was not to be denied that Jack relapsed. He did nothing that

[1] Tuke's Description of the Retreat near York is reviewed by Sydney Smith in a number of the 'Edinburgh Review,' for 1814.

was violent or alarming—he merely laid himself down on the mat before the door of her room, and refused to eat, drink, speak, or move, until she returned. He heard her outside the door, before anyone else was aware that she was near the house; and his joy burst out in a scream which did certainly recall Bedlam. That was the drawback, and the only drawback; and how she was to take the journey to Frankfort, which Mr. Keller's absurd remonstrance had rendered absolutely necessary, was more than my aunt's utmost ingenuity could thus far discover. Setting aside the difficulty of disposing of Jack, there was another difficulty, represented by Fritz. It was in the last degree doubtful if he could be trusted to remain in London in her

absence. 'But I shall manage it,' the resolute woman concluded. 'I never yet despaired of anything—and I don't despair now.'

Returning to the sitting-room, when it was time to go to the theatre, I found Mr. Keller with his temper in a flame, and Mr. Engelman silently smoking as usual.

'Read that!' cried Mr. Keller, tossing my aunt's reply to him across the table. 'It won't take long.'

It was literally a letter of four lines! 'I have received your remonstrance. It is useless for two people who disagree as widely as we do, to write to each other. Please wait for my answer, until I arrive at Frankfort.'

'Let's go to the music!' cried Mr. Keller. 'God knows, I want a composing influence of some kind.'

At the end of the first act of the opera, a new trouble exhausted his small stock of patience. He had been too irritated, on leaving the house, to remember his opera-glass; and he was sufficiently near-sighted to feel the want of it. It is needless to say that I left the theatre at once to bring back the glass in time for the next act.

My instructions informed me that I should find it on his bedroom-table.

I thought Joseph looked confused when he opened the house-door to me. As I ran upstairs, he followed me, saying something. I was in too great a hurry to pay any attention to him.

Reaching the second floor by two stairs at a time, I burst into Mr. Keller's bedroom, and found myself face to face with—Madame Fontaine!

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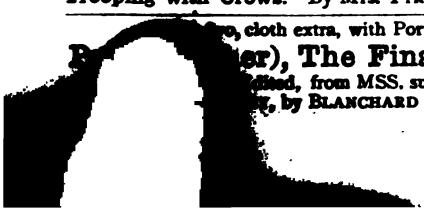

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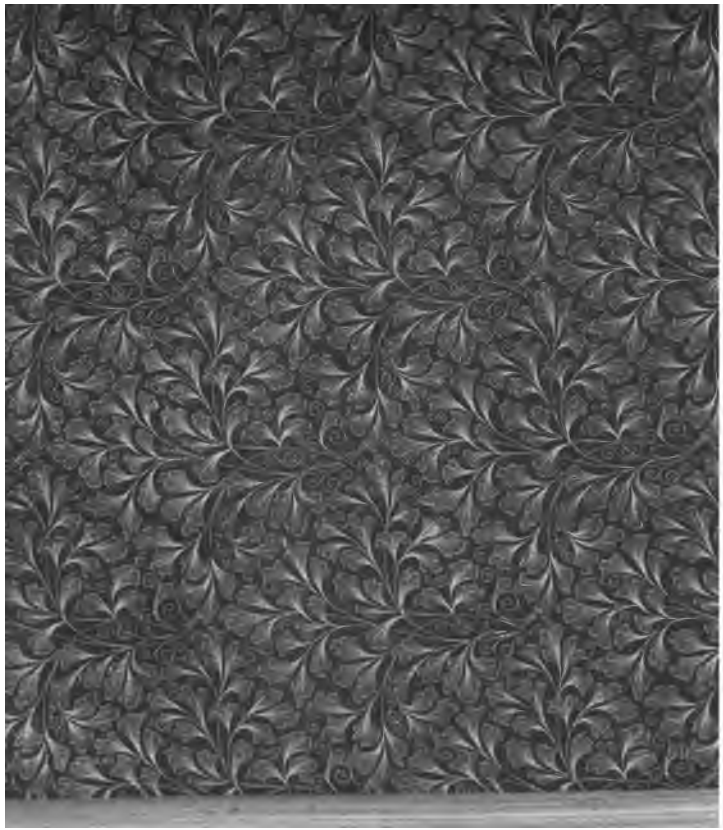
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